WORDEATER

95

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Mark and Craig!

Anonymous

The air was thick with chicken
as teenage mutant ninja carebears defended
against a fifty-three foot marshmallow poet
and his semi-automatic salami.
Pens struck as mallow rained down
and engulfed a hapless tan bear
while cliche bombasted over broken ground.
One flabby bear ran, crying "Spam! Spam!"
While each came under the cyclops eye
was transmogrified, and rose bespectacled
and endowed with a salami.
After a salami salute
the teenage mutant ninja carebear mini-marshmallow turtles
marched off on painful insteps
to engage the fearsome Tintern Abbots,
Learned Astronomers, and Nightingales.
Each wondering what it would pick up next.

Is this what we do, Mark?

Poetry vague as smokey semiotics
like a flashlight through velvet.
We can all do this.
Wake up and write
of crotches caught on newel posts
while dolphins sing Wagner.
Wrap ourselves in Duchamp
and insist it's art.
To roll naked in chemtone
and sell the rorschach blots
to blue haired ladies in
environmentally responsible
Mercedes Benzs
Pictures of purple pachyderms
staring into the tigers eye while
dogs play poker with a velvet elvis.
Art to hang on the refrigerators
with realtor's magnets.

Smallest Generation

Anonymous

Not the children of Woodstock
We're the naked mud mottled babes
with celluloid sailboats
who played in wading puddles
torn from the earth
by sandal footed parents
while Joe Cocker belted "I Get By"
over clouds of candy drugs in a voice
reverberated up to form out battle cry.
Our latex skin
captured in two dimensions
by news crews and pedafiles
home movies for three generations to gawk
the same frames that catch our parents' cleansing
skinny-dip in the lake
too deep for our age
reveals a generation consigned to mud puddles
grass hung from our genitals
and earth caught in the cracks of our youth
never clean again.

We counted years on fingers
and patterned plaid polyester parents
while flower painted aunts
adorned uncles' Medals of Honor and Good Conduct
with mustard and wilted lettuce.
We learned warfare from David Brinkley
and killed Charlie in the Park
taking the same hill copse every day
through the summer.
Some became masters of the rubber K-bar
other became inept at "gorilla" warfare
Years later one forgot his childhood training
pulled a grenade, threw a pin, and turned half his platoon
into marinera sauce.
He never got the Purple Heart we practiced
pinning on him as he stood at attention
atop the slide
the only medal we understood.
We practiced and perfected
playing at grown up with Hope and Faith
behind the dumpsters,
or smoked cigarettes and doobage
pilfered from "tomato plants"
that thrived in ultra violet basements
despite gray painted windows
until we learned smoke rings, microdot and all
the terms for each.

We started high school and cashed
the inheritance check our parents wrote in '69.
Though free love was tainted
by emaciated death,
we wrapped with latex
and covered in plastic wrap

carried on the tradition of '69.
Kid Charlemagne's first generation
of chemically altered Cocaine customers,
we bought his rocks and promises
embraced childhood images of Starskey stripes
Huggy Bear, and Jack Lord, traded up
plastic pistols for heavy blue steel
and packed it to class,
spread blood against drugs in Panama
and for Oldsmobile blood in Saudi,
while our little brothers and sisters wore
our letter sweaters and sampled substances
we were weaned on by our earth mothers
Janis and Mama Cass.

We watch our parents movies
without them or blushing rug rats
trying to catch a first glimpse
of the opposite's sex,
or teatotler's scornful pupils judging
our dances on celluloid.
As a pixie does the double puddle jump,
another the sodden diaper pull,
our father's bad acid slam
knocks us to earth.
While the voiceless babe in the center
mouth open, fists and eyes clenched
against intruding stimulus
released the first yawp
only the dandelions heard that day
an unlikely generation was born
in upstate New York
though it took us years
to spit the oatmeal from our tongues.

Black Crows

Mary Bowden

Rough shag of black silk
Long claws clamped onto the gate
Horrid eyes warn me

Moon

Mary Bowden

The hypnotizing light
of silvery gray
Coming through my window

Waking me suddenly
I stretch to see
the full gray sphere

A paragon of beauty
Peering down at me
with a peculiar silence

I lay back down
to fall asleep
While my watcher watches me

4 dash 6

J. Cavallero

eyes
i close mine
the salt of the tears
that well up in mine eyes

burn

at first
then dissolve with the images
in my mind

with the closing of mine eyes
comes the closing of my mind

'they were broken images anyway'

they run
down the side of my face
and nest themselves in my ear
when dry
they irritate my ear
it itches

i scratch my ear
and i scratch away
the images in my mind

'but they were broken images anyway'

glass can be recycled

'shattered dreams once shattered
will remain shattered
no matter
how your try to mend them
and one gives a god damn
no not one'

they seep
through my skin
and
into the canals in my ear
and
somehow find themselves back
to my mind
they possess the very
essence
of my broken images

the cycle begins and the wheel starts
to turn

and since i can't
escape from these not only
broken
but
shattered
images

i close mine
the salt of the tears...

four years of forever

J. Cavallero

waiting for inspiration to strike
like the dull blade of an axe

restless sleeping, storms are creeping
where will i rest

full blown relaxation
the memories remain clear

a pale blue horse standing over olive green water
those trees, swing, break, protect, grow
leaves dropping

a smell, reminder to a memory

J. Cavallero

Was it Saturday or Friday afternoon?
Was it a full, or half moon?
I do in fact remember the stars
dancing, from Jupiter, or was it Mars?

Green hazes washed toward me
as a strong face gazed on me
We both know what's lurking
behind these eyes, those thoughts...

could have been anything
but I know one thing
we were thinking the same thing
Some place on the train

The doors were opening
strangers moving
hearts pounding
we were staring

Goodbye

J. Cavallero

At the University of Nowhere
the smiles came few and far between
or at least that's how it seemed
Even though there were tiny friends
scattered about

He lost his mind maybe once or twice

He never wanted to fall the path of the red-headed
stepson he was

Then the trigger fell

And so did the red hair
and so did his mind

cradled reflections
Jennifer Chubb

moonlit beacon of a tall grassy landscape
mirages in the cool night cradle me in their arms
poetic lines of
devastation
lust and
envy
muddle themselves in someone else's mind

an imaginary link between
the moon
the stars
and life itself

is that life or just shallow breathing?
in through your mouth
out through your nose

always keep your chin up looking towards the heaven...
confusion - no - just thinking

some call it a character flaw
maybe it is a genius in progress
either way, time is having it's way with you
how we choose to spend it creates our depth...

ah- do not patronize me with your lack of wit and charm
disguise yourself...
it is the only way that you will 'fit in'
the puzzle is already there
you may be the missing piece
or you may not fit in at all

muse
Jennifer Chubb

hypnotic chanting
spirit possessing
floating apparitions conjure up a lunar mirage
the light of the moon
casts a shadow on the trees
bringing them to life...
dancing with the forbidden creatures of the night
misunderstood by the sources of light
the trees cradle the yin and yang
they understand what the rest of the world
can not realize

Night City View
Rondi Collette

Quick snapshots of lives
framed by lighted windows
hanging in the night sky,
sanctified by streetlight constellations.
A city-light galaxy
giving magic
to reality.

Streets and slums
scrubbed clean by the darkness,
even the coldest existence
glows warm in artificial light.

Haiku version

City cold living
warmed by artificial light
magic of the night

Justify
Rondi Collette

Forgive me while I try
to justify my existence
to see if it makes a difference
if I'm here
or if I'm gone.

I don't know what I believe.
Is what I see the only answer?
Haven't heard an explanation,
is it truth
or is it wrong?

Do you know what you believe?
Always looking for the reason,
Is the search the only meaning
to our lives before we're done?

It's easier not to look.
That's the choice that we are given.
We can search or never wonder,
we can look
or just move on.

Rondi Collette

Calendar pages
and numbered clock faces watch
as time passes by.

Rondi Collette

Commuter train dreams
shadow slack-jawed faces,
nodding heads keep track
of passing time.

Dream destinations
of other places
while workday races
with no end
in mind.

Rondi Collette

Trapped in a world
of my own making,

a world too small
by my own design.

Middle-aged confusion

Rondi Collette

I lay down the years in life
layer on layer
once distinct
now the strata
together like sand in time

Haiku version

My middle-aged thought
become young with memories
of years yet to come.

Rondi Collette

subjective, objective,
possessive pronoun,
present tense,
passing tense
feelings around.

singular modified
plural becomes.
syllabic
stressing is
too two to one.

subjunctive to moodiness
caesura... pause...
why did i
take this class?
well, just because...

a stranger in a crowded room

Mark Davenport

EVERY TIME I SEE HER WALKING BY
SHE CATCHES MY WANDERING EYE.
I'VE SEEN THAT GIRL SOMEWHERE BEFORE
MOVE RIGHT PAST ME AND OUT THE DOOR,
BUT I NEVER DID FOLLOW HER.

I REMEMBER ONCE AT A CROWDED PLACE
I COULDN'T STOP STARING AT HER FACE.
SHE SAW ME LOOKING,
SMILED THEN GLANCED AWAY.
I WANTED TO APPROACH HER,
BUT DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY.

ALL NIGHT WE STAYED BESIDE OUR
DIFFERENT FRIENDS,
AND AS THE DAY WOUND TO ITS END
I WONDERED WHEN I'D SEE HER AGAIN.

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE NIGHTS
I HAD TO LEAVE TOO SOON
TO TALK TO THAT STRANGER
IN A CROWDED ROOM.

SHE SEEMED SO OUT OF PLACE
IN THAT HIGH-SCHOOL CROWD;

SHE WAS SO QUIET; THEY ALL ACTED LOUD.
MY FRIENDS ALL SAID THAT SHE WAS TOO YOUNG,
AND I SHOULDN'T LET HER
CAPTURE MY FASCINATION;
SHE'S STIRRED AND RAPTURED MY IMAGINATION.

SHE WAS SITTING ALONE IN THE CORNER;
I WANTED SO BADLY TO WALK ON OVER
AND SEE IF SHE'S REALLY DEEP AND PROFOUND,
OR SHY AND TIMID, WAITING TO BE FOUND.

OFTEN SHE LINGERS IN MY THOUGHTS,
ON MY MIND
AND I THINK: HOW COULD I HAVE BEEN SO BLIND?
HOW COULD I KNOW
THERE WOULDN'T BE ANOTHER TIME?

AND I GO WALKING BENEATH
THE STARS AND MOON,
THINKING ABOUT A STRANGER
IN A CROWDED ROOM.

MOMENTS NEVER LAST;
TIME MOVES TOO FAST
TO ENJOY OUR BRIEF DANCE
WITH MYSTERIOUS CHANCE.
HOW COULD I HAVE KNOWN
THAT ONCE I'D SEEN HER GO
SHE WOULDN'T BE COMING BACK?
I WAS AN OLDER GUY
WHO DIDN'T TRY;
SHE WAS A YOUNGER GIRL
FROM A DIFFERENT WORLD-
BUT I CAN'T QUITE FORGET
THIS BURNING REGRET;
I JUST CAN'T ACCEPT
THE FACT WE NEVER EVEN MET...

ALL NIGHT WE STAYED BESIDE
OUR DIFFERENT FRIENDS,
AND AS THAT NIGHT WOUND TO AN END,
I WONDERED IF I'D SEE HER AGAIN.

BUT IT WAS ONE OF THOSE NIGHTS
I HAD TO LEAVE TOO SOON
TO TALK TO THAT STRANGER
IN A CROWDED ROOM.
I WALK BY MYSELF, HUMMING A LONELY TUNE;
MY LIFE IS FILLED
WITH STRANGERS IN CROWDED ROOMS.

Sitting in Chad's Garage

Mark Davenport

Sitting in Chad's garage-
Lounging,
My feet perched upon the table.
The joint tasted sweet,
Unraveling between my fingers.

She was there with her beautiful dilated eyes,
Tripping over her mind.
She had eaten mushrooms
Tainted with a dose of psychedelia
And thought they tasted rather good.
She laid close to me,
And always apologized for it.

But was she sorry?
I surely wasn't.

I felt her subtle burden
When she leaned her head
Against my shoulder,
And I longed to hold her with my arms,
Touch her with my hands.

Instead I sat there-
A stoned solemn stoic wall...
Unyielding,
Unrelenting,
Uncomfortable.

"You should live a little," she said
(To me?)

Maybe I should just walk a little;
I haven't breathed a word
Silly or profound
In at least an hour.

But no one puzzled over my mumbled words
In that hour;
No one misunderstood my fumbled fragment-sentences.
It's easy to be the listener,
Quiet and nodding
And always so agreeable.

Chris Davis

As the starting gun sounded, Colin sprang from the blocks and jumped out to a huge lead. He seemed to almost fly around the quarter mile track. Checking the competition over his should, he saw he had widened the gap between himself and the next closest runner. He couldn't believe he was the fastest runner in eighth grade. He broke the tape, but didn't stop running. He ran off the school grounds, down the block, and down the sidewalks of Main Street. He kept running, faster and easier, until his hometown was far behind him and he was running in unfamiliar countryside. At last his legs gave out at the sight of a mammoth hill in front of him. He trudged up the hill, sorry he had spent all of his energy. When he reached the top a most unexpected sight welcomed his eyes. A city street spread out before him, vacant and ... dark. He had run into night time! A towering structure on his left demanded his attention. It was four stories high, newly whitewashed and immaculate. Above the front door a black sign read:

ATLANTIS GENERAL STORE

Two and three story structures on either side of the street were freshly painted, bold reds and proud greens, dainty yellows and imposing blues. It appeared at once to be a place of vast wealth and booming business. Then why was no one there? His thoughts were rudely interrupted, as the clang of the bell up the street gave him half an answer. It was midnight. But still, he thought to himself, as he strolled shouldn't someone be out? A policeman? A night watchman? He walked aimlessly, wondering where all the inhabitants of these fine buildings were hiding.

It had the makeup of most small towns he remembered seeing on a trip out west - old deserted 'wild west' towns. A saloon, bank, jail, the general store which occupied half a block. Colin turned his glance to his left, where a sign read 'strangers welcome.' He approached the door it indicated apprehensively. It was painted a solid black, with a gold knob. The knob was freshly polished and felt warm to his touch, as if someone had just let go of it. The door creaked and swung open, and he slowly began his ascent. Up the creaky stairs he proceeded slowly, an eerie sense of familiarity with the situation invading him. A very dim light was glimmering at the top of the stairs. He counted the steps to take his mind off of whatever it was that lay before him. The light in the stairway was growing softer and Colin couldn't suppress a feeling of nausea. He now counted 20 steps. The staircase had become narrower as he go higher - he was sure of it. At its base it was the regular width of a staircase, but now he could feel the smooth plaster on both his elbows, the fresh paint on it moist with condensation.

Claustrophobia was setting in. On the 25th step, he reached the foyer. He told himself to be calm. He tried futilely to catch his breath. He could hear his heart pounding in his ear, like a bass drum at a parade. The light was now slightly brighter, and the door stood wide open, so he gathered himself as best he could, and stepped into the room.

The small room was empty except a wooden kitchen table at the far end of the room. An elderly woman was seated behind the table, and above her stood a stoop shouldered man, one hand resting lovingly on the woman's shoulder. The features of these people were remarkably undistinguishable, Colin noticed instantly. The woman beckoned with a scraggly finger, and Colin, unnoticed to himself, moved toward her slowly. As he approached her, he studied these strangers. The man was wearing a three piece navy suit with white pinstripes, a weathered fedora, and neglected black wingtip shoes. The woman was wearing a plain dress, knee length, and black high heels. Though she must have been in her seventies, Colin decided she was probably beautiful in her day - the look of a truly beautiful woman still pervaded her face.

Colin numbly moved his feet with very awkward and deliberate steps, toward the people whose clothes were very visible but whose faces remained shrouded in mystery. He was being pulled forward against his will.

Colin gasped. He immediately recognized the face of the old woman. It was his dead grandmother, whom he had never met. He turned his look to what surely must be his grandfather, and sure enough, there stood the man who graced his living room's largest picture.

"We've been expecting you, Colin," his grandmother rasped. Colin couldn't comprehend his own thought. His steps shortened to almost a shuffle, and pained to move a leg at a time, like moving through quicksand. He couldn't take his stare off of them, and realized his jaw was probably hanging down, but couldn't find the power to lift it. When he reached the table his face flushed at his realization of how bad his manners were, and he looked ashamedly at the floor. As he waited for something to happen, someone to say something, a thought occurred to him.

"Am I in heaven?" he asked, looking up unafraid of what the reply might be.

Colin touched his arms and kicked his left foot with his right, making sure he wasn't dead. He studied his grandparents closely, and although they appeared as specters, he was sure they were as real as he was at the moment. Then he saw something he had never seen in the picture: his grandfather smiled.

"It's very nice to meet you," his grandfather broke the silence. The smile didn't fit on his face. Colin understood plainly why he had never seen it before.

"It's a pleasure to meet you both," Colin replied, his heart in his throat, and his mind laughing at how formal he was, even with people dead twenty years.

His grandmother slid her chair back with help from his grandfather, and she moved slow but sure around the table. She reached

out to hug him, and he emphatically responded. As he felt the warmth and deep affection of his grandmother's embrace, he wondered at the miracle of what was happening. His grandmother began to mumble some grandmotherly phrases and weep softly on his shirt, when Colin heard a phone ringing in the distance. He hadn't remembered a phone when he walked in, but presently his grandma pulled away slowly from him, and headed for a corner of the room. As Colin shook his grandfather's hand he looked in the direction his grandma was headed and noticed an old fashioned black phone like he had seen in movies on top of a white table, which had ornately carved legs and a half-circle of smoothly polished black marble on its top. He returned his gaze to his grandfather, still wringing his hand, and looked deep into his eyes. He was hoping to steal the secrets of life from behind grandpa's honest brown eyes. He was irritated that grandma hadn't reached the phone yet. The incessant ringing was ruining the moment. He didn't feel comfortable enough with these people yet to criticize his grandma for taking her time getting to the phone, but it was starting to disturb him. Finally, it got to be too much, and he turned to yell at her,

"Would you answer the phone already!" he demanded.

"You get it. It's probably for you anyway," she replied.

What? he thought to himself. How rude of this woman I've just met to...

"Answer the phone!" she shouted.

Colin sat upright in bed. The phone was ringing, and he raced out the door and down the hall, still dazed from his startlingly lucid dream.

ACROSS THE FLOOR, THE LIGHT OF MY LIFE

Glenn E. Dyer

We had had a great year and a half, my college classmate and I; a couple young bachelors for the University of Iowa now working in Chicago. We had been transportation majors, he now worked for an oil company and I for the Illinois Central Railroad. Our apartment on the near north side, across from Lincoln Park, was only fifteen minutes from downtown. The bars were much more exciting than the ones on the edge of our campus; and those city girls definitely had more class than our country girl coeds.

Still, the real fun seemed to be at the mixers, sponsored by a Chicago Women's group, where out of town college graduates could meet other college graduates someplace other than at bars. The dances were held monthly on the tenth floor of Loyola University's Loop Campus building, a great location with a view of the lake and downtown. Life was great! It was late summer when Bob sprung it on me, he was getting married; some Polish girl I didn't even remember meeting. The sneaky coward, or did he just get hooked?

Except for the expense of the apartment, his getting married didn't bother me all that much, I had sort of been thinking about it myself. I had a "bird in the hand" in Chicago, as well as "one in the bush" in New Jersey but the life of a young bachelor in the city was a really great life. So long, that is, as you had a "steady" for the weekends, so why spoil a good deal with marriage. Then it happened, right after Thanksgiving, the "bird in the hand" flew away (leaving me no date for New Year's Eve.) I'm on the prowl again, this time alone. That's the trouble with girlfriends, they only introduce you to girlfriends who have boyfriends, so if you split it's like - get lost, get out of my life. I thought I might go out East for the holidays but the "bird in the bush" had been neglected too long and wrote that she had accepted a proposal. Panic set in, New Year's Eve coming up and no date. The thought of going to a mixer by myself was frightening, but not so much as the thought of sitting home alone on that greatest party night of the year.

Already the guys I worked with, all married, were talking about their plans for the holidays, plans that did not include any good looking bachelors, even though I had been at their homes before. Sunday night rolled around, the first one of the month, mixer night. I hated to go but had no feasible alternative. I went. I felt glum, embarrassed to be by myself, and probably showed it. I danced a couple times, was turned down a couple more times and had decided to have a coke and leave. At that miserable point of the evening, glancing around one more time, much as a gambler might throw his last bill on the table, hoping, I saw her across the floor. She was with some other girls, yet stood slightly apart from them. She was medium height, light hair but not real blonde, her eyes bright and light colored, blue, I soon found out, but it was her smile that hooked me. I think I knew, even then, at that moment, that here is the light of my life.

I walked, non-chalantly, I think, across the floor and asked my dream to dance. She accepted. I was temporarily tongue-tied, but a we danced and she melted into my arms, her feet following my every step, my comfort level returned and conversation moved along. A slight pause occurred when she told me that she taught with the girl who had dropped me; however, before the evening was over I asked her out for New Year's Eve. She seemed reluctant to give me a yes. Probing, I learned she had hoped to have seen a certain Notre Dame man there that evening. Formidable competition called for immediate action, I whispered in her ear "I'm here; do you remember the old adage - he who hesitates is lost?" Perhaps she remembered another old saying about a bird in the hand being worth two in the bush. Before the dance was over, she agreed to be my date New Year's Eve.

It was something of a whirlwind romance. I proposed in March (she said yes before I finished the question), I gave her

her diamond in April and we were married in October, forty-eight years ago next month. To this day she's the light of my life.

Untitled
Leah Errichetto

I've been walking down this desert
road forever it seems
Built up the courage to keep
walking with these broken dreams
Plastic faces greet me at every
new town.
The same emptiness that always
seem to pull me down.
I stood alone the day the blue
fell from the sky.
I was so surprised to wake up
to find myself alive.
I don't even know why I try to
live this ugly lie.
You're never there when I need you
by my side.

I fall and you stand there watching me
I need warmth and you help to burn me
Didn't ever really want the life to decay
I just wanted all the pain to go away.

I wake up crazy every morning until
I smoke my green
The sun is hazy makes me lazy
yet it makes you mean.
I thought about you over and over in
my hell
I don't understand why we are living
we should be dead.

I am so negative and so angry that
I've been betrayed
I feel frustrated, feel so hated;
things don't go my way.
Here I am alone again. Where are
you?
You don't feed it when I need it;
I feel used.

I fall and you stand there watching me
I need warmth and you help to burn me
I didn't even really want the life to decay
I just wanted all the pain to go away.

The Garden
Leah Errichetto

I fade into the garden
my mind in a haze
Searching for fruitfulness
made up of green and red.

The dandelions stand erect,
Their fuzzy stems spiraling
to a crispy root
enslaved in the black earth.

The apples share a glow
Identical to that of the sun
Bright, burning and ovular
They hang proudly against the blue.

Timid butterflies made of silk
Dance their mysterious tango
Fluttering before my eyes, they unravel
Their trance of beauty.

Lilacs lurking in the long stem grass
Reaching out for my hand
To grasp and hold onto
With a violet velvet touch.

And now I feel fulfilled
As I steadily fall
To the exit if the garden
the entrance into Hell.

Portion of God's Love
Cindy Evans

I awoke that morning with a start,
I knew the time was near.
Our baby was going to be here soon,
That was very clear.
But as our baby entered this world,
Something was very wrong.
He did not cry or make a sound,
the doctor tried so long.
At last the faintest cry was heard;
Our baby finally breathed!
Then as he was whisked away;
No longer within our reach,

We begged the doctor and the nurses,
"Please tell us, will our baby live?"
"Only time will tell," they said,
"The answer only God can give."
The next morning the doctor said,
"Your baby is doing well,
But retarded he will be.
We do not know just how bad,
Take him home and see."
Then our son was brought to us,
I held him in my arms.
The tears flowed freely and we knew
We would protect him from all harm.
Such a tiny human being!
We couldn't comprehend
Why he must be called "retarded"
When God did to us send
A newborn son made in His own image.
We knew what we would do.
Take him home and love him
And know that some day, he too,
Would know God's love for him.

The years have flown,
Our son has grown.
Once again my tears flow.
But not for my son, you see.
My tears flow for the baby who is born
with a disability,
Whose parents choose to let him die.
He must suffer for several days
Because the parents will not try
To take him home and love him.

Now my tears flow once more,
No longer for that baby,
For he is with God who loves him so.
My tears are for the parents,
For they will never know
The love this child could have brought,
The hugs, the kisses and the joy
As he says, "I love you."
They will never know the joy of teaching
And seeing this child learn.
They will never see him reaching,
Reaching out to life as he loves it so.
They will never learn from him
That God did to them send
A special gift from above,
A small portion of God's love.

A Teenage Lesson

Cindy Evans

Most of us have done it at one time or another. Kids do it! Adults do it! It's fun! It can be a pleasurable experience, but our parents warned us of the consequences, hoping we would heed their warning.

I remember the time that I learned this lesson the hard way and wished I had listened to my parents.

I was a teenager. A group of my friends and I decided to get some girls together and go to our church gym and play volleyball. It was a Friday night and eight of us had permission from our parents to meet at church. It was a feat in itself that we could actually get eight sets of parents to agree at the same time that each of us could go out. We looked forward to a good volleyball and joking around. I was well known for my dry sense of humor and by this time, most of my close friends knew when I was kidding. Unfortunately, they did not always know when I was serious.

Our church was not the kind of building one would think of when one thinks of a church. It was located on the south side of Chicago. The year was 1965. Some years before it had been turned into a church, this old building had been a tavern and dance hall. What originally was the dance hall on the third floor was now our gym. When playing volleyball, we had to be careful not to hit the ball too hard. If it hit the ceiling or walls, the old plaster would fall from the ceiling. If there was too much activity on the floor of the gym, plaster would fall from the ceilings below on to the second floor, where our janitor now lived. The building was old, the kind of one in which haunted tales are made with dark places and crevices in which to hide. One's imagination could run wild in this place. No one dared to be alone. It was located in a neighborhood where the "winos" lived, and my mother had warned me about them since the time we had moved to Chicago when I was five and had managed to put the fear of God into me.

On this particular Friday night, six of my friends and I met together at the church. We walked up the creaking wood stairs to the second floor and knocked on the janitor's door. We had called Mr. B previously and had made arrangements with him for this evening of volleyball. He opened the door and greeted us and then proceeded to unlock the steel door leading to the stairs which would take us to the third floor. As we went through the door he informed us that he would lock the door behind us and in two hours he would unlock it when we were finished with our volleyball. This door could only be locked and unlocked from the outside.

Mr. B and his family would be leaving for a short time and since my one girlfriend, Janice, had promised she was coming and had not yet arrived, I talked him into leaving the door unlocked for her. Against his better judgment, he left it unlocked.

We walked up the stairs holding on to each other. Each of us was afraid of getting separated from the others. There was no light in the stairwell and the darkness was so thick that I could not see my hand stretched out in front of me. Cara, being the bravest of the group, lead the way into the first room, the kitchen. She took tiny steps, having one arm stretched out in front of her, in the complete and utter darkness, as she edged her way toward the middle of the room, reaching for the string to turn on the light, hoping all the while that she would not walk into a cobweb. Invariably, one or the other of us would try to scare someone else by grabbing her. As typical teenage girls are, when one screamed, everyone screamed. At last we all gave a sigh of relief as the kitchen light was turned on. Then we has to pass through another room, in the same manner, turning that light on and then on to the dark spooky gym.

Unbelievably, we had to walk clear across to the other side of the gym to reach the light switch to turn on those lights.

Again we all stuck together! In spite of the scary atmosphere, we enjoyed going there because it was a chance to be together with friends and not have any adults present. And there was something fun about being scared, or at least so we thought.

We turned on the lights and then set up the volleyball net. Seven girls! Three on one team and four on the other. I had hoped Janice would be there soon to even out the teams. She was already 15 minutes late. I thought about the unlocked door at the bottom of the stairs. Although the thought of a stranger walking in and doing us harm continued to nag at me, I brushed off the feeling. It'll be okay. No one knows we're up here. No one will bother us. I was too busy enjoying our volleyball game and didn't want to think of anything else.

Then I thought I'd have some fun. I told the other girls that I had heard someone in the other room and thought it was Janice. I went in there and came out screaming! "It's not Janice but somebody's in there," I yelled. Everyone came running. Together we checked it out, but no one was there. "Alright Kathy," they said. "That's enough!" I laughed to think that I had pulled one over on everybody, little knowing that I would later greatly regret having done this.

As time went on I thought more and more about that unlocked door. But Janice had promised she would be there. She would have called me if she could not have made it. She always had in the past. I was sure she would be there and she had to be able to get in. I didn't want her stuck down there outside that steel door all by herself where no one could hear her. I shrugged off the negative feelings I had about the door being left unlocked.

As we continued to play volleyball, I heard a noise in the other room. It sounded like someone walking. I was so relieved. At last Janice was there! I ran to greet her. I entered the room. Janice wasn't there! Funny, I thought. I was sure that I had heard someone. I knew that my imagination could run wild at times, just as any teenager's could. But this was not my imagination. I was sure of it! I turned around and looked behind me. None of the other girls had followed me. They had had enough of my "crying wolf." They thought I was just going to pull something on them again and they would have none of it. I could not believe that not one other person had heard the sound that I had heard. Six other people and not a one had heard it. There was someone there in that room besides me! I could feel it!

I glanced around the room one more time. Two closet doors! A chalkboard, table, chairs! The piano! Oh Lord! There in the corner next to the piano was a man! He was crouched down! He had on an old hat and his head was bent low. His arms were wrapped around his legs. His hands were gray, probably from filth and I fearfully realized that he was probably one of the "winos" who lived and wandered around in the area. This was one of those men that my mother had warned me about since I was a little girl. Terror seized my body for a split second causing me to seem to be frozen to the spot. I had no control, and was unable to speak. I could feel my heart pulsing throughout my body. After what seemed like an eternity, but was probably just a few seconds, I regained control of my body. I screamed! I ran back to the gym, yelling "There's a man in there!" No one believed me. They laughed!

"Sure Kathy, sure," was their reply. I couldn't get them to believe me. I would have given anything at that moment to have never cried wolf so that my friends would have believed me.

I was still shaken. For a brief moment I wondered if it hadn't been my overactive imagination. All the stories I had heard about the horrible things that had happened to young girls flooded through my mind. What if he had a gun or knife? What if ... maybe my fears had caused my mind to imagine this. But no, I was sure of it! I had seen him in the corner next to the piano. I kept seeing those gray hands. I repeated it over and over to my friends, "We must get Mr. B," I said. "He should be home by now."

"That's it Kathy. Knock it off." They laughed at me! They thought I was kidding. No matter what I said or how much I appeared to be shaken, they would not believe me.

Then Cara said, "I'll prove. I'll go look." She started to walk out of the gym. I begged her not to go. I was hysterical. At this point I was crying. I was scared of what he might do to Cara. But I couldn't stop her.

"We must all go together and get Mr. B. Please don't go in there alone. Please!" More laughter.

Cara walked into the other room in spite of my pleading with her not to do it. She was gone for a minute of so and came back laughing even more. "Just the big bad bogy man," she said. That did it. Now no one believed me and furthermore they were all angry with me.

I continued to cry. "We have to go together and get Mr. B. We have to!" Cara said that she would go alone and get him. Again I pleaded with her to wait so that we could all go with her.

But before I could get everyone in a group, she left. We could hear her laughing all the way down the stairs. She was determined to prove me wrong and show everyone that the joke was on me.

Minutes later, those of us left behind in the gym, could hear Cara and Mr. B coming up the stairs, still laughing, with me as the butt of their joke. By now I had managed to put fear into the girls who were left behind with me. They weren't quite sure what to think. After all, I may have cried wolf before, but I had never let it continue this long.

When Mr. B was in the room where I had seen the man in the corner, I felt a little safer about entering it. However, I entered the room ever so cautiously. The other girls followed. Mr. B was laughing as he said to me, "Kathy, what is this about a man with gray hands?" He gave another hearty laugh.

It's true," I said. "He was right over ... over there." I pointed to the place where I had seen him, at last forcing myself to look there. No one! There was no one! How could this be? I had seen him. I wasn't crazy. Where could he possibly have gone? "Oh no!" I thought to myself. "Now they will never believe me." Out loud I said, "He was here. I know it! He has to be here somewhere, unless he left." Of course. A great ending to a joke. When I said that he may have left, everyone was convinced that I had indeed been crying wolf.

But I was still scared. Mr. B was about to leave and go back downstairs, but my hysteria caused him to keep looking. He knew I wouldn't be happy until he had checked everywhere, not only in that room, but in every room on that floor. Thinking that the whole thing was a joke and laughing all the time, he opened the closet door. A man fell out! Everyone screamed as we quickly huddled together and clung to each other. Mr. B grabbed the man. No one was laughing now. Cara became pale as she repeated over and over, "I can't believe I came in here alone."

The man was drunk. All of my screaming and carrying on had caused him to find refuge in the closet. He told Mr. B that he had come up there to "pray." Sure he had! Mr. B escorted him outside.

We never, ever were in the gym alone again without adults present. When I think back about what could have happened, I shutter. But one thing is for sure. I finally heeded my parents' warning and never again "cried wolf."

A Child's Prayer

Colleen Fitzpatrick

The dancing bells are ringing.
Tap your foot from left to right.
Do a little jig.
Everything will be alright.

The Governing House

Colleen Fitzpatrick

Woven through magic,
yeah, I've been there.
Seen myself through the tapestry,
mind-and-soul bare.

I've been in the house of Neptune-
yes, I've been there much too long.
Ruled by poisons and narcotics,
my will has not been strong.

My mind has fallen apart,
body weak from all of the above.
I feel myself, I feel myself,
where is all the love?

Daniel's Dream

Colleen Fitzpatrick

He touched nature where no one had,
his beat within the land.
His pool among the goldenrod,
his park along the sand.

A Mother's Gift

Colleen Fitzpatrick

The joy of motherhood
is re-discovering
the innocence and beauty
of the world,
through your childs eyes.

Megan's Folly
Colleen Fitzpatrick

She stooped to see her reflection
in the puddle the night before:
smiling, reaching to stroke her cheek.
Rippling the water, her face was no more.

She stopped to say Hello to the butterfly
suckling from a flower.
Grabbing for color, it flew away.
She started to run after, but why bother?

Sweet little girl filled with innocence of us
snap into reality before getting crushed.
Escape from the world you perceive from Disney;
time will come much too soon, when life is not so easy.

Be brave the best days of your life, many years will follow.
Confusion, poverty, war, destruction and sorrow.
Play now, little girl, while you have now.
Enjoy today - in the end, you too, will bow.

SIXTY MINUTES
Janice Glavin

There is an hour in the day when the world the world turns
soft and pink like the six o'clock sky.
When words breathe from are lips, seep into are bodies
and rub are hearts free from pain.
And in the hour your hands
become your lips
And your eyes
become your legs
And your voice
becomes your silky skin
And you
become perfect with me.

And the minutes of this hour tick as slowly as decades
and the sweeping of the second hand of the clock creates
our history and future
until alarm goes off
and we have to leave.

CROSS STITCHING
Janice Glavin

As I sit creating my awful sewing toward Bedlam
I hear the echoes of these reedy women
Their souls weaving through
my needle's eye
Blackening the color of my stitch

They call me to join the club of red and white circles
martinis, cigarettes and
secret vampire flights

They entice me with lusty pinpricks and the sensuous
teetering edge between these neat rows of crosses
and their cult of endless creation.

22 MINUTES
Janice Glavin

This fountain has the coolest, sweetest water in the city. When I push the spout, the water arcs up gracefully like a gentle breeze pulling off the lake. The droplets form a flawless half circle, clean and sleek, not splashing outside the rim but sliding smoothly downward, streaming perfectly in my mouth.

Sometimes I like to press the handle just to watch the fountain perform its dance like a skilled ballerina leaping elegantly in the air then knowing precisely when to change direction and float angelically downward, never actually touching the bottom.

I sit here every afternoon eating my tuna sandwich while I count the people that stop to drink. Today there are seven. Seven people gripping the sides of the fountain bowing their heads to take in the liquid.

I wait until everyone is out of sight and then approach the fountain. I drink feverishly until I can feel the blue peace in my fingertips. Then I rise with a chilled wet smile, clean and satisfied.

It takes 22 minutes to drive from my fountain to the house. When I pull in the garage it is 2:47 pm. There is enough time to do a load of laundry, let the dog out, and prepare dinner. I go into the kitchen and pull a long, gray knife from the drawer, slice into an onion and release the foul fog throughout the room. Behind me the frying pan crackles and spews its meaty grease at me, branding my arms with angry red circles. I continue to cook, wounded and raw, until the heat of the dinner hangs heavily in the house like an untold secret.

At 5:06 p.m. the table is set, and I peek out the window at all the neighbors returning from their outside lives. At 5:13 p.m. he

pulls in, window down, music blaring, cigarette carelessly flung to the street.

"Hi baby! Come here sweetie. I love you, honey. You wanna go out?" he leashes the dog and strolls outside to greet the neighbors. I sit at the window and watch the cigarette smoke billow upward as if an invisible being were breathing in this man's trash.

Just as I begin to slice the limes for his vodka & tonic, the two return smelling gamey and hot sharing a secret like two buddies in a locker room.

I set the drink down, sit at the table, and fold my hands for grace. As he mumbles the prayer, I gaze down at my ring, trying to angle the stone toward the window so it catches the light. It sits there, a dull cloudy rock, hard and indifferent. I can't remember the last time I've cleaned it.

"Did you hear what I said? You wouldn't believe the case that was presented this afternoon."

His words float above me, and I see them hanging in the air begging me to paint them in to a picture.

"He has no idea what the fuck he's talking about."

I paint a big fat man wearing black socks and boxers shorts face to face with a lingerie-clad whore trying to talk his way to fucking her. I smile as I see the whore rolling her eyes and looking at her watch.

"Hey what's with you? I asked if I could get a glass of water. It's hotter than hell in this place."

As I looked over to the steel sink, spotted and dry, I could still hear his words, surrounding me, filling my ears, slithering up the walls.

I told him that we could either do it my way or forget the whole damn thing.

22 minutes

"What exactly did you do all day? There's shit all over this house."

22 minutes

22 minutes

22 minutes

I spin on my heels to look at him directly in the eyes. "There is no water here. I'm thirsty too."

"Well that figures. What the hell am I supposed to do? I'm dying."

I grab my car keys, my purse, and an empty water bottle. "I'm going to get a drink."

Mi Familia

Janice Glavin

It was one of those days when the warm October sun fooled you into thinking it was May, that spring was on its way, that the leaves would stay green. Marie walked home from school that Friday, her cheerleader shirt flinging with her steps. Every few minutes the wind ruffled through her legs and showed a glimpse of her blue spandex panties. She smiled at the seduction of it all. The excitement of the weekend spread through her belly. That day Marie was named captain of the cheerleading squad, that night was the first home football game, and later that evening she would flirt with the quarterback at the after game parties. She felt pretty, popular, and her life at school was perfect.

Marie walked up the sidewalk toward her house. She always was embarrassed of the chipped paint, the loose stair, the mismatched curtains, and the bright green that was her house. The colors were fake. It was as if the colors tried to mask the poverty and lack of quality of their things. She pushed it all out of her mind and went to open the front door.

Just as she was entering, Toni appeared, her face white and troubled. She was holding a stuffed dog in one hand and a coloring book in the other.

"Marie, you're home. It's Dad, it's...he's..."

Marie rolled her eyes. "Toni, you've got to quit getting so worked up over that loser. Let's go inside, and I'll tell you about the game tonight."

"Marie, he's dead."

"Yeah right, Ton. He's just passed out again. Believe me. If he were dead, it would be the greatest thing that ever happened to this family." Marie pushed her way into the house and flicked on the TV "Come on, let's watch cartoons. Hey, let's open those taffy apples Mami bought. I'm starving."

Toni paced back and forth, nervous and scared while Marie bit into an apple.

"Come on, Toni. We can split this one."

Suddenly the back door flew open. Anna walked in and stood in front of Marie and Toni. "Would you like to tell me what the fuck you're doing," she demanded of Marie. "I got a call from Toni about Dad, I hauled ass to get here, and you're sitting there eating. Where the hell is he?"

Marie licked some of the apple juice that ran down her fingers. "Passed out. What else is new?"

Toni started to cry.

Anna was furious. "We need to go up there, figure out what's wrong with him, and get Toni to calm down all before Mami gets home. Now Marie, come upstairs with me."

Marie stood up, wiped her hands and said, "Fine. We'll wake him up, he'll show up to work, and his buddies will let him sleep it off on the shipping dock. Like we haven't done this before."

Anna shot Marie a look and grabbed her arm toward the stairs. As they marched up Marie laughed, "See? He's not dead. You can smell his disgusting B.O. from here."

Both girls fell silent as they crept closer to his room. The smell hovered thickly in the air. It was sour and hot and clung to their clothes. "Oh my God," Anna whispered.

They stood at the foot of his bed. He lay there completely wrapped in a blanket, his face toward the wall away from the door. Marie touched his foot expecting to feel his sleeping sweat through the blanket. It was hard and unresponsive.

"Marie, go look at him and see it he's breathing."

Marie slid toward his face, no longer questioning Anna's orders. She thought of Toni. Someone should be with her. She stood before his face. All the markings she hated for years were there - his mustache, thick and black covering his straight mouth - his nose, swollen and bulbous taking up his whole face - his eyebrows stretched along his forehead, angry and defiant. These features were all present under a chalky purple mask that held him there unmoving and harmless. She felt a leap in her stomach knowing that the words, the fists, the embarrassment, the hiding .... all of it was over. "Anna, he's dead." Marie's voice quivered.

Anna walked dumbly toward Marie. "He can't be. Marie, touch him. Touch him again. He's fine." Anna's words fell short as she stood in front of their father. "Oh God. Oh my God. Let's get the hell out of here!"

The two girls ran out of the room screaming and pushing each other like children at a haunted house. At the bottom of the stair sat Toni wide-eyed. "Is Daddy okay? Is he going to work?"

Anna rushed to the phone and Marie took Toni's hand. "No, Ton. There's something wrong. Anna's calling an ambulance and they'll take care of him. Let's just sit here and you can tell me about what you did in school. We'll wait for Mami and Liz to come home, and we'll tell them what happened."

The two sat together while Anna frantically called the police, "No, no I don't know what happened. Please, just send someone over here."

Just as Anna slammed down the receiver, Mami and Liz walked in. Mami's accent was thick with fear. "What happened? Where you father? Toni - Antonia - she okay?

Liz ran to the kitchen and poured some brandy out of a bottle in the cupboard. "Mami drink this. You need to calm down."

Marie stood up. "Well thank goodness everyone's here. I've got to get ready for the game. Lori's picking me up in an hour."

Anna lunged toward Marie. "Sit your ass down. You're not going anywhere. Dad's fucking dead upstairs and we've got to get that goddamn corpse out of here!"

Mami's face broke. The glass of brandy shook in her hand as Liz took her into her arms.

Marie sat down. "Jesus. Just give me the phone when you're done. I don't know who's going to take my spot now. I'm the only one who knows all the cheers."

Liz came over and sat next to Toni. "Are you okay, sweetie? Do you want to lay down in my lap?"

Marie could see her family spin around her head - Anna making phone calls to his job, the funeral parlor, the priest - Liz holding everyone's heart in her arms - Mami trying to hold back her tears and soothing Toni. And her father floating above them all. "It's over," Marie thought. "Let's just get on with our lives."

There was a knock at the front door. The sirens blared in the background. Marie knew that the neighbors would be peeking out their windows as the police officers and paramedics entered the house. One of the officers motioned to Anna, "Can you please have everyone leave the room while we remove the body?"

Mami started to scream, "He wasn't like that! He is a wonderful person! You girls no believe me! He is you father!"

Liz held Mami and Toni as the paramedics ran up and down the stairs. Anna and Marie tried to get one last glimpse of their father as he was carried out the door. There was nothing to see. Just a body under a white sheet.

"I have three daughters myself ma'am. You have a beautiful family. I'm sorry about this." A young officer timidly approached Mami knot knowing what to say through her sobbing. He looked toward Anna, "Uh ... we uh ... found these under his pillow."

He handed Anna three things - a wad of twenty dollar bills rolled tight in a rubberband, an empty bottle of Gordon's vodka, and photograph torn and wrinkled at the corners. Anna walked toward her family to show it.

The picture was about ten years old. Toni was still a baby. Mami was holding her, the wind blew her black hair over her cheek. She was smiling just enough for her eyes to crinkle at the corners. Anna, Liz, and Marie were dressed in matching jumpers that Mami bought at Sears the week before. They were holding hands and laughing. They remembered that photo. Dad had been gone for two days and Mami found money in his drawer. She packed up the girls in the station wagon and followed the signs to Wisconsin. They parked the car in front of the lake. Anna pulled out a camera and asked a passerby to take the picture. He had said that they were a beautiful family and that they must make some man very proud. They all smiled when he said they were beautiful. That's when he clicked the camera.

The girls looked at the picture and turned it over to see what he had scribbled on the back.

Victoria
Anna Maria
Elizabeth
Marie Luz
Antonia
-Mi familia, 1975

She was terrified by her microwave
Rob Gondar

She was terrified by her microwave
and drank cold Jewel soda from cans;
she took fencing lessons from an ex-Turkish general
and knew six different ways to cook flan.

Chinese poems no. 1 and no. 2
Rob Gondar

1.
"Falling Plum Blossoms" is just a song
But sing it in a tavern and everyone stops to listen.
Even no-good husbands, when they hear it,
Leave their drinks and hurry home.
2.
A horse nods, chewing sagely:
Biting flies explain this curious answering.
No one hears music;
still, the barefoot girl dances near him - why?
Whoever dances knows this answer too.

In Berlin they got a church
Rob Gondar

In Berlin they got a church.
It sits right in the middle of the business district.
Bombs knocked the top right off it
like it was a bottle with the neck cracked off,
real jagged and
black around the edges.

They didnt fix it.

Encounter with a wounded owl
Rob Gondar

An owl at the nature park
glowers out at me from his shelter/cage.
I am afraid he has
the exact same eyes my cat does.

On my reading Laotse and not understanding him
Rob Gondar

Cleverness is loud
and therefore is more clearly understood
than quiet knowing.

The letter "Cookie Monster"
Rob Gondar

On Sesame Street, unprompted,
a little girl is singing

a, b, c, d, e, f, Cookiemonster -
h, i, j, k, lmno, Cookiemonster -

O how the hopeless attention span
(O who?) (oh, sleeps!) (shun naps at ten!)

of a four-year-old
(our lordy! fa-fa! E-o!)

leaps
[insight-blindingly, flash of weightless]
joy

Up late in bed I write a poem
Rob Gondar

My wife's half-sleeping face,
half-turned away from my
untimely lighting of the bedroom.

Her cheek,
so warm against my ear,
against my lips feels cool.

Everyone loves to eat
but what kind of fool starts cooking beans
at bedtime?

Some mysteries, at least,
I leave till morning.

The goat juggler
Rob Gondar

When the dusk begins to gloat
over its foresty aromas,
and coolness oozes out
to stake warmth's claim
and pan the clearing,
there sometimes comes

the goat juggler

to launch great haunchy goats
into the gloaming -
one upon another, vaulting up

and lilting down,
like no goats beknown to man or child,
dog or Doctor of the Schoolmen, tame or wild.

A true account of the pants I once wore to a party
Rob Gondar

My big brother Mike
was adept at adapting
fashion to solve many
social dilemmas.

When the demands
of the then-hopping
three-year-old party scene
included appropriate clothing,
my pants had the problem of being
unseemly and torn
up one leg, from ankle to hip.

Inventing an extemporaneous fad,
Mike decided to rip
(no mean feat for a five-year-old mind)
up from yonder ankle/up to yonder hip
to give a symmetric, if dicey, effect.

Content with this,
needless to say,
we went,
bearing as gifts
two freshly-baked play-doh clown-faces on sticks.

One Illinois Center
Rob Gondar

At this address
you cross the street indoors.

In the concourse there's a waterfall of sorts
where the Hyatt meets the mall;
it splashes unrelentingly next to the five short steps there.
Should anyone for any reason
be led into temptation
(say, to sit quieted) by it
a sign nearby warns against loitering.

So: go in to Hyatt-tower rooms
or wander outside-indoors
among the well-dressed masses,
but--no staying!

This Center,
being central,
would seem strange to be so much
in motion.
After all, all wheels have hubs
dead center,
and moving tires wheel around the steady axle, don't they?
I say they should rename this place
One Illinois Tire.

Theodore
Rob Gondar

In stolid tones she spoke his swollen name.
As if to make him seen so much the smaller.
Pale words attempt to dim the flash of flame.

A sister, finding honesty in shame,
Turns in her twister brother, makes the collar.
In solid tones she speaks his swollen name.

Could anyone, confronted by the same
Bright darkness, tone the sun down to a pallor?
Pales words attempt to dim the flash of flame.

For Theodore, existence was the game
In which you teach the world to fear the dollar.
In stolid tones she speaks his swollen name.

Mathematics, put to death-uses, became
The new equation; mind-might made him taller.
Pale word attempt to dim the flash of flame.

And Furies scour the Earth to quench his blame.
This Phaethon arose to scourge the squalor.
In stolid tones she spoke his swollen name.
Dim words attempt to pale the flash of flame.

Everything in its place, and nothing new

Rob Gondar

Everything in its place, and nothing new
(when claustrophobic thought call out for remedy)
dares speak its absent mind to answer: you.

Sad teachers, proud and pale, begin to see,
when rollback threaten livelihood and "culturedness,"
the laughter trapped behind that tomb-slab, "Me."

When rugbying for position, stiff-arms bless—
till curves, defeating, prove you too Euclidean.
You sanctified a future-proof success.

Great lessons learned and left are learned again
when "lessor" men, at pains to carve the carcasses
at Easter feasts, entreat a meatless harvest, then.

The Greatest Love

Mary Head

I will never forget the day you came into my life.
It is etched forever in my mind.
The first time I looked into your eyes I knew
I felt a love like I never felt before.
We were connected, you and I.
You depended on me, you needed me.
And as the years past, I realized
I would do anything for you.
I would give my own life for yours.
It was as if when I looked in your eyes,
I saw me staring back at myself.
Over the years I am quite sure you have seen
at least some of my faults
but you love me still.
Nothing goes to my very soul the way your pain does.
Nothing melts my heart the way you do.
You will be the love of my life forever.
And although I may not always agree
with the decisions you make along the way,
I will stand beside you and support you through anything.
I've never known a love so deep,
so pure, so true.
All of this I discovered
the day they put you in my arms.
My own flesh and blood,
My baby, my son.

TIMING

Mary Head

Just when I decide I'll try,
He walks away.
When I want to open my heart,
He closes the door.
When I really hope he'll call,
He doesn't.
When I'm ready to take a chance,
There is no chance to take.
Timing is everything-
I guess I learned that too late.

A Woman's Cry

Mary Head

Love me for who I am -
Not who you want me to be.
Let me be myself-
Instead of controlling me.

Don't manipulate my movements
by laying guilt trips on me.
Don't lie about your feelings
if you don't really trust me.

Love me, don't lecture me.
Console me, don't control me.
Support me, don't suffocate me.

Love me for who I am-
not who you want me to be.

Additions
Mary Head

Okay, $400 is my limit tonight,
    no ATM card,
    no checks,
    no Visa.
Tonight is my lucky night,
    my birthday,
    my anniversary,
    New Year's Eve.
I'll definitely win tonight.
Where should I start ?
    Roulette,
    Blackjack,
    Video poker,
    The slot machines...
Roulette was good to me, now let's try Blackjack.
That was agonizing.
How can I be down $200 in a matter of half an hour?
Video poker will be good to me.
These machines always pay off if you play them long enough.
Yes! I am right back where I started the night off with.
Maybe Blackjack will be nicer to me now.
I can't believe it, fifteen minutes later and I am flat broke.
Still one hour left on the cruise, and no money.
Hey, there's Joe!
Buddy, loan me $100 and I will pay you back tonight...
Guaranteed!
Yes! A flush on poker, I am on a roll now...
My last $5...
Keep it?
I could win...
Oh, what the hell!
Thank God this cruise is over.
Next time I'll only bring $700.
I'll win...someday.
Maybe tomorrow.
Tomorrow's the 10th.
Ten is my lucky number...

The Storms
Mary Head

The noise is intense
can't you see the fury shining in my eyes?
Look deep into them.
Don't you hear my voice shouting out reasons to go?
Do what is right so you can live with yourself.
Love is not selfish
but you certainly are.

Waves of repeated affection
beating upon the walls of the fortress
surrounding my soul.
Scars and resolve being pulled off by sweeping winds.
The storms surge deteriorates the mortar
used to keep the walls strong.
A swell of both love and hate
as memories seep from cracks in the walls.
The walls begin to crumble, but the foundation stands fast.
The sandbags of strength and independence
begin to fight back.

Retreat and lose force
storms of lies and selfishness.
Please leave-
Give the raging emotions time to die down,
to repair the damage of yet another invasion of the soul.

The Attack of the Giant Bats
Dave Heckler

They were hit by a beam from outer space.
They mutated at a steady pace.
They try to end the human race.
Nothing can stop them, not even mace.

Destroyed the Western Hemisphere.
Attacked the fisherman of Delaware.
Killed TV exec. Norman Lear.
Ate a girl getting a papsmear.

Ate a boy playing with a yo-yo.
Noshed on the citizens of Tokyo.
Came out of the skies of Idaho.
Not even the bull escaped at the rodeo.

The militaries of nations where called in later,
After half the planet turned into dinner.
They shot their missiles from June to November.
But still there seemed to be more critters.

The world was being divided.
Scientist's ideas collided.
Several causes were cited,
but no single cause was lighted.

Then suddenly one day they disappeared.
No more reason for them to be feared.
The human race would no longer be smeared.
But for their possible return the world would be geared.

They were hit by a beam from outer space.
They had mutated at a steady pace.
They tried to end the human race.
But nothing stopped them, not even mace.

Do You?

Dave Heckler

Do you have to be here?
I don't care.
I don't want you here.
Do you have to be
Near me?
Seeming to be
Everywhere I go?
Don't make me
Look at you
How you judged
My "imperfect" life
Disgust me!
Get away!
Before I ruin you!

POSSESSION

Dave heckler

Clingy hands
Hold you tight
Threats and pleas
Overcome your mind
The wrath
Wraps you
Around a finger
Round and Round
Squeezing
'Til you no longer
Have a say
In what goes on
Your mind is now possessed
By a demon
That lives near your home
And knew you
Long before
The demon named
Possession

?

Jeff Hicks

schnoogie
schnoogie
feeling
Groovy
almost
mental
kinda
Loopy

nuzzle

Jeff Hicks

I give you my only gift
Which you accept
As your only gift
Was never given to you.

You've had more taken away.
Your innocent pink ribbon
Torn to shreds
Before you knew you had it.

Safety,
Not in numbers
But in my actions
Compassion,
In respect
To your flatline
Silence,
A rarity
In need of cherishing

As I give you my only gift.

Katherine revisited

Jeff Hicks

Katherine's fingers are in my hair again,
twisting
teasing,
gentle mannerisms;
never learned
on instinct,
not on command.

I sit silently,
mental murmurs of soft wind,
her the artist and I the barren paper,
fingers brush through my fibers,
relaxing compassion,
expression,
of love.

They drift down to my cheek, round to my neck
and back again.
Goosebumps of lulling nature
nails gently scuffing my skin.
circling around,
throughout
back up,
and down.
Ease into sleep.

That Sound

Milly Laux

What is that sound?
that sweet whistle sound
I hear it calling
calling me
so soft and alone sound
it calls me, calling me
do I want to go?

Others have been called
been allowed
my friends and neighbors
family too

What is that sound?
that sweet whistle sound
alone sound, low whistle sound
in the silence
calling me
calling me
home?

I can't forget that sound
-never forget that sound-
oh, sweet whistle
quiet, alone whistle
soft blowing
crow, blowing to me

in the silence
the still silent breeze grows
the whistle blows
to call me home

slowly going
silently blowing
woo woo wooing
wanting me
to
GO

The whistle calls again now
a wayward blow
I hear it closer now - low
summoning
whistle
the sound calls me
a piercing
beaconing me
its-
I shall go
I must go
ten years old
on
the train to Auschwitz
(dedicated to Peter Ginz)

P & H

Milly Laux

Pride and Humility
Humility and Pride
the first steps on the other
the second wishes to hide

Humility and Pride
Pride and Humility
go nowhere without both
together
they
power your ability
gel your agility
total your tranquility

GROWING UP ON A FARM

Milly Laux

Jumping down off the smelly school bus, Melany hurried to change into her old jeans to quickly pick the eggs, before her dad, Al, could spot her; before she had to hear him remind her, one more time, "Look all over, Melany, check all the buildings. Don't miss any spots, or they'll spoil."

She ran past some of the cribs and sheds, looking into them, from the door, just so she could 'legally' say that she'd looked all over. Then, she picked in the coop, being careful not to run right into her father while he prepared to milk the cows. In the back of her mind, she often worried about how old some of the eggs where. She's been scolded severely that time an egg, sitting on the kitchen counter, had burst. Everyone had run outside gagging, except, of course, her poor mom. Mae had stayed to clean it up. What a mess and rotten smell! It was funny, too, Melany thought, but her dad didn't think so, and she was tired of being scolded.

Mae brought dinner in as Melany finished setting the table. Her brothers, John and Tom, sat down. Her father still washing his hands and putting hand lotion on again. He had recently taken on a job at a stone quarry, as well as the farm, and was having trouble with his hands. "Look all over, Melany?" Even before she sat down. "Yes, Dad," she replied. "Well, I found a few, again, behind the combine." How did he already have time, she wondered? "Well, they weren't there, yesterday," she responded. Her dad gave her 'the look.' She knew he was disappointed, again, and so was she. Why did he always have to be disappointed in her?

John changed the subject, "Daisy's milk looked kind of funny again today, Dad." Melany knew what happened and appreciated her brother in that at only twelve he worked like a man. Sometimes he didn't do things well enough for their dad either but it didn't seem to bother him as it did Melany.

"I'll check her tomorrow," Dad replied. "Tom, you'll have to help clean the chicken coop, Saturday. You're old enough now." Eight year old, Tom curled up his lip, then pinched his nose with thumb and forefinger. Everyone laughed. Melany thought, good dinner conversation. Her dad always talked chores at the table, their mother always kind of quiet.

Tom was just learning a lot of farm stuff as the baby. Melany resented that but also knew he'd be doing heavy duty man's work soon enough.

Then it happened. "Gravy tastes a little like glue, again, Mae." Her father looked at her mother and smiled. She said, "Oh, really, Al?" and smiled back. He always said things like that to her and she NEVER said much back, just smiled. Sometimes, he called it "Wallpaper paste." Melany wished her mom could be stronger or fight back. She could feel stronger too then. She knew if it were her, she would have a better answer.

John talked about his eighth grade football meeting then. Their dad said, "I hope you have time for that, John, with your chores."

John said, "I arranged it with the neighbors to get a ride home in time to milk the cows, and do the rest." He also had to feed the eight cows, thirty pigs, and a few sheep. Melany was glad that John would take time to do something for himself.

Her mom feed the chickens while Melany picked eggs. In fourth grade, she could have handled the feeding too by now, but her mom always helped her. Mae just seemed to know that Melany wanted extra time for her school studies. She was a good student, but always worried about being done in time. And, girls were treated differently than in the 50's.

Her father looked up from his mashed potatoes and wallpaper paste gravy, "Well, everyone will help with the chicken coop on Saturday, and next week we may need you all to help with the corn if its ready." The children all smiled about the last one. They knew that meant taking a couple days off of school to help get the corn into the crib. Melany thought about her spelling test on Friday and hoped the husking wouldn't include Friday.

Her dad would work the field husking and using the large Allis Chalmer tractor to pull the one row husker, which would cut the corn and separate the corn from the husks and stalks, then toss the ears into the wagon being pulled behind it. The rest went to the ground for cow feed or fertilizer if not made into shocks. Her mother and John took turns pulling the wagons in from the field, pulling with the second, small tractor, their little "put-put," everyone called it.

Melany and Tom stayed in the wagon as the front of it was lifted by the elevator jack; and they pushed and made sure the corn dropped out through the tailgate into the grain elevator. It was like a long metal snake conveyor that then brought the corn up to the top of the crib's corn bin and dropped it in.

The jack itself was like a large metal swing set without swings. A metal base on the ground brought the front two wheels on the wagon up so it would empty the load into the elevator track. The small tractor pulled the wagon through the swing set until the front wheels were in the base ready to lift.

On Wednesday morning, her father came back into the house after milking and before work, and said, "We'll be husking the next few days, so let your teachers know. If the crops good, you may be out yet Monday." They all smiled; but then, Melany thought about her spelling test, Friday, and her stomach did a tight squeeze. She knew that she already knew those words (by heart) but she was still scared that the teacher would ask her to take the test that day, instead.

Al told Mae to gas and oil the tractors and elevator equipment, to get things ready Why did he talk to her mother that way? Her mother already knew what had to be done. Her mother always had to work so hard. Why did she put up with it?

If Melany had known the night before, she probably would have had a nightmare about the spelling test. Sure enough, when

she got to school, she told Mrs. O'Connor about husking and sure enough Mrs. O'Connor said, "Well, Melany, do you know your spelling words well enough to take the test today?"

"I think so," she confessed, and taking the paper out of her desk, once again, her stomach tightened and hurt. And when she got to the words "whether" and "receive," she couldn't remember which whether she needed, and if the "i" or the "e" was first in receive. So she got a ninety one instead of one hundred and was upset all day, mostly with herself, but also with her father. Why didn't he tell her sooner?

Her father came home from work that afternoon upset about his hands. When he and John milked the cows, Melany looked over from the egg picking, and saw him struggling and working very slowly. He was worried about husking with his hands bleeding and hurting. Her mother medicated and taped the larger cuts, then found some lighter weight gloves in the basement and said, "Al, you can wear these under your regular gloves. Your hands will be ok." Her mother took care of everyone. And her father smiled, then said, "Did you get the tractors ready?"

"Sure," Mae said. Melany just cringed.

Melany, John, and Tom were all excited and busy with the morning chores and getting ready to start husking, but they made sure they were out in front of the house when the school bus went by so they could wave at all the kids. Melany saw the neighbor girl, Rea, who always bragged about her things. It was nice to have Rea's envy just once. It was such fun!

A couple of neighbor men stopped by to offer help but Melany's father said he needed them there for bailing hay in a few weeks. "I'm sure my family can handle it this time alone." The men looked happy to move on to their own work. Farms were such hard work. Her father checked on Daisy's milk again that morn and the antibiotic was helping but her milk still had to be thrown out.

Her dad prepared and hooked the husker up to the tractor and started out to the field. Because of his hands, her mother and John checked the elevator and jack and had to oil the chains that lifted the jack base. They forgot to return one chain to the side.

Her father was out husking about a half hour or so when her mother decided it was time to take the second empty wagon out with the little 'put-put' and switch wagons in the field. Then, she'd pull the full wagon in the half mile or so. This took some time with the small tractor. When she arrived in the farm yard, she decided to let John pull the wagon into the jack while she started the elevator movement to the crib.

John scrambled up to the metal seat of the tractor while Tom and Melany climbed up and jumped into the wood and metal wagon full of corn ears.

Tom was screaming with delight as he felt the cool cobs on his arms and legs as Melany glanced around to see John start the tractor forward. Just then she noticed the chain still down but John was looking down at the hitch to see that tractor still had a good connection.

She began screaming at John to, "Stop! Stop! Stop!" But John couldn't hear her with all the noise of the tractor and the jack and the elevator 'clickety clacking.' To her, it felt all in slow motion, yet horribly out of her control and happening too fast.

The wheel of the wagon caught on the chain, and she saw the top part of the jack, hundreds, maybe a thousand pounds coming down on her brother. Right down on him, his head, neck, and the steering wheel of the 'put-put.' It clipped the top of John's head and somehow pinned his head and neck within the steering wheel.

By now, she was raw screaming and crying. Jumping to John's side, then to her mother, all at the same time. Her mother had missed the whole thing because it was out of her vision on the other end of the wagon.

Eternity passed as she finally got her mother to look up and see what had happened.

Mae rushed to John's side and yelled at Melany to, "Go get Dad, hurry!" Already half stumbling over the cut off corn stalks, she looked back to see her mother trying to lift the jack with her shoulder. She arrived at her father's location in seconds. But could he hear her? Would he look? Would John die? She didn't dare to get too close to the large equipment. Finally, he looked up and stopped the tractor. Cry yelling as she spoke, her father instantly disconnected the husker. She jumped up on to the large tractor fender and hung on while her father drove home at full speed. Would they get there in time?

They arrived at the yard to see her mother bent over John on the ground, blood everywhere. Her mother had wrapped a sheet around John's head and Tom was standing next to John all white and crying softly. She glanced at the top of the 'put-put' steering wheel.

It looked like a nasty red smile with the jack still resting on it. Her parents, without speaking a word, carried John to their car and drove away.

Melany knew they were taking him to the doctor in the next small town because they went East, instead of West, to the hospital in a larger town. Somehow that, and looking at Tom, brought her back to a feeling of some normalcy. She sense that Tom desperately needed her comforting, her help.

She guided him into the house for a drink, and led him into the living room. "Let's pray," she said. This brought Tom back to the steady ground. This was familiar to both of them. He stopped crying and wanted to lead the "Our Father." He had lead it for his First Communion class just last spring. They knelt before the Jesus picture on the living room wall. She could see that he was feeling better and color came back to his face.

Then they talked about it all. She asked Tom how her mother got John out from under the jack. Tom said, matter-of-factly, "Oh, she just picked it up." Then he started crying again. Melany

kept wondering how her mother really got John out from the heavy iron monster. Though scared and feeling so alone, she felt a strong 'necessary' new feeling about herself and about her mother.

Several times they went back to the jack and even tried to lift it. No budge, of course. Hours slowly passed. It was late afternoon, and no word, no phone. As she passed the barn, with a jolt, she realized the cows needed to be milked soon. Her father always insisted that they be milked on time. "No cruelty to animals here," he'd say. Clumsily, the two of them got the job done. Then they rested. In between, Tom wanted to talk, or pray again. It was good that they were busy. They went to see the tractor again, with flashlights. Then, she remembered to have supper. She made pancakes, she knew how. She thought about the spelling test of the day before, and it seemed so small.

Finally, as they sat on the porch steps in the dark, they saw some lights coming from the West, the hospital direction.

First, her father got out, then her mother. They came alone to the house, holding each other. When they finally saw the children, they laughed and hugged them. Her father said, "John will be ok. He needed many stitches and x-rays and he will have to stay at the hospital for a couple days, but we are a very lucky family. He is going to be ok. Somehow the jack just grazed the top of John's head."

Melany's mother ate, washed up, got some of John's things, and then, drove back to the hospital to spend the night next to John.

In the morning, three neighbors and an uncle came over with their tractors and huskers; and Melany, her father, and Tom all pitched in and finished the husking late that day. Her mother had come home to do the milking.

Her father straightened the steering wheel and column on the 'putput.' The newspaper people came to ask Mae how she did it.

When everyone left, her mother started supper, then asked her to finish the cooking, while Mae got ready to return to the hospital. Just then, her dad turned to her and asked, "Hey, can you make 'wallpaper paste' gravy?"

Melany just looked at him then happily, couldn't stop laughing.

CORRECT ME IF I'M WRONG

Milly Laux

"Correct me, if I'm wrong."
What would you have me do?
"Correct me, if I'm wrong."
What does that mean to you?

What would you have me do?
Maybe, I'll tie your shoe.

The "do" is done.
It's in the past.
The die is cast.
Correct me, if I'm wrong. {?}

It's just another
melancholy song.
What would you have me do?
Insincere taboo.
Correct me, if I'm wrong.

Melancholy
politician
salesman
Saturday night rendition
song
MELON COLLIE
SONG
{What would I have you do?}
{Correct me, if I'm wrong.}

What was last
must last.
It's in the
past.
The air has heard
the painful dirge.
Forever, are the words.
You haven't the courage.

{W W Y H M D?}

JUST for FUN

Milly Laux

rhema
ema
edema

really doesn't seem a
bit too heavy
for spaghetti

soooooo take some JELLO
you like the smell o'?

pie, and make of myself a fooool
with MUCH FUN
and HULLA BA LOO

and YOU CANBET I'd
just love to rewatch that Jedi

OH, now that was justaball
TOMORROW
I'll surely feel small.

CORPORATE FLYER

Milly Laux

The employee did conspire
to be a buyer
of the entire
empire...
and so was hired.

In corporate attire
collision inspired
jealously admired
his career a spiral
as task hero,
he was ... dire!

He manicly acquired
with insane desire.
His ladder ill-wired
his role flat-tired.

As litigation liar,
was aghastly ..... fired.

So early retired
and promptly .....EXPIRED.

(and posthumously re-admired?)

AN (OBTRUSIVELY) HAIR RAISING DAY OF RAP

Milly Laux

So, I saw the other day,
As my life was on its way,
That my 'bob' was curly dropping,
No longer girly flopping.

Hastened to the parlor soon,
Kind of like a big cartoon,
And got it soaking, sopping,
Hair-stylist started chopping.

Around the place, I noticed:
The head growth help mop mopping,
The boss my hairdo cropping,
My cowlick, she's re-topping.

Now, it's time to go hop, hopping,
My ears took in, "No copping!"
Yield 'check or cash?' my opting.
Next, 'rock and roll' time bopping.

Through the glass, just then, looked back,
Popping eyes, I mouthed, "Hey, Jack!"
The beauty chores style stopping,
What? Burger King Whop whopping?

Now, jerky duo yapping.
Form curlers stopped their snapping.
Jazzers quit hair wrapping.
The fools introd drug napping.

A "Music Place" loud zapping!
The Hair Group - All now 'Rapping!'
REFLECTION ... Saw MY SCALPING!
WRONG PLACE! I did my shopping!!!!!!!

GRANDMA'S REITERATING TATER TIPS

Milly Laux

Grandma always said,
"For a tater, it's always best,
To keep in the dark,
Even moisture could start a nest."

"And keep them cool and dry,
In a dark kitchen cave."
"It's where they best like it,
And where they behave."

"Or worse," she said, "the warmth
Of the hot sun—NOT.
They may start to grow,
Or more likely they'll rot!"

As a kid, I just said,
"It's no skin off my back,
If taters sit happy,
On dark undersink rack."

She said, "If left to rot,
Or taters start to grow,
They'll never be good tots.
Wet and sun, their worse foes."

I said, "Grandma,
What are we talking ABOUT?"

She smiled and said,
"Take care of all that you've got."

"Take care of all,
The things you own.
According to each one's needs.
They'll always make you PROUD!"

Delores Lee

The greatest poem ever known
Is one poets have outgrown:
The poetry, innate, untold
Of being only four years old.

Still young enough to be a part
Of nature's great impulsive heart,
Born comrade of bird, beast and tree
And unselfconscious as the bee ...

And yet with lovely reason skilled
Each day new paradise to build
Elate explorer of each sense,
Without dismay, without pretense!

In your unstained transparent eyes
There is no conscience, no surprise:
Life's queer conundrums you accept,
Your strange Divinity still kept ...

And life, that sees all things in rhyme,
May make you poet, too, in time ...
But there were days, O tender elf,
When you were poetry itself!
by Christopher Morley

"THOUGHTS"

Delores Lee

That happened to this wonderful
beginning when we were all "Poetry
itself?" How do all these tender
elves become the walking wounded?
The more we know how we lost
our spontaneous wonder and
creativity, the more we can find
ways to get it back.

I AM NOT A GIRL - GIRLS ARE 11

Amy Lingafelter

i ate an anorexic today.
she was tasty, her bones were crunchy,
mike got disgusted and called me
a fat pig.

A LETTER TO JOHN LOCKE

Amy Lingafelter

Dear John Locke,
It is four o'clock in the morning. I think I need your help. Please come write on my blank piece of paper for me.

This thursday letter was never answered by Locke, as he is living dead and cold, somewhere near the North Pole. I waited at the mailbox, and the north wind that swarms around Locke's igloo traveled all the way down here to whirlpool blank papers around my head

but no answer. So, bored, I called my friends to be unfriendly.

"Jason, before you get lit tonight, tell me again my flawlessness."

Jason just giggled off the alcohol,
peroxide to bleach blankly...
"yeah, I had you. You haven't changed."

But I was entered, vaguely in july sometime,
and my walls closed in on the lurching

person who walked by thursday without a second glance.

Jason gets really sloppy joed and tells me I deserve every
bad thing that ever happens to me.

The north wind thinks it's my fault...
my entrance lives with all of us.

So say John Locke, July, Jason
every time they look at me they see me getting fucked,
but I don't care for those that don't care.

The papers are tornado-ing
white washed plain brain bleach lost.

John Locke will tell you the North Pole is blank and cold
even in July.

LARGER

Amy Lingafelter

I JUST FELT LIKE TALKING TO YOU.
THAT'S WHY I CALLED, MIKE SAYS

HE ADDS THAT HE'S BEEN DYING TO
TELL ME THIS AND NOW HE THINKS I
CAN HANDLE IT SINCE THERE'S SOME
DISTANCE THERE.

YOUR BREASTS ARE BIGGER. HERS ARE
SO SMALL. IT'S LIKE ME, LIKE TOUCHING
SOME GUY, MIKE SAYS.

THERE'S SOME DISTANCE THERE.

SHE DOESN'T LIKE GIRLS LIKE YOU THAT
DON'T WEAR BRAS. SHE THINKS YOU'RE NASTY,
MIKE SAYS.

HE APOLOGIZES FOR CALLING. HE ADDS THAT
HE JUST NEEDED TO TALK TO ME.
HE LIKES TALKING TO ME.

SO, HERE I AM, PRAYING
THAT MY CONVERSATION SKILLS
HOLD WITHOUT WHEN HE'S FEELING HER UP.
NOT VERY HEALTHY,
HUH?

Beautiful Beautiful

Jenna Lockwood

Simba plays ping pong with a
grape, while on fly patrol.

Leaps into the air in an instant,
and lands on his lengthy paws.

He stares in a coma at Bert and Ernie
Motionless...

Sharing potato chips, he is
watchdog at the foot of my bed.

Disney drawn eyes dilly dally
along my features curiously careless.

Kisses are given to me in feline
recognition of camaraderie. Acceptance.

Morning "Me-Mowes" wake me with
sneezes.

My lazy bones in a beautiful package
still being unwrapped, exciting, endless.

Untitled

Jenna Lockwood

Clouds, crashing waves, in a
cobalt sky, splashed against
the moon.

CHASING RAINBOWS

Bob Loewe

Feet held firm by the adhesive
of spilled beer, we move timidly
to bad Doobie Brothers covers,
share a cigarette
like a childhood disease
in our communion of the rainbow-
no pot of gold found
no holy grail
save tulip glass stemware
of Bloody Marys
their celery stalks erect
a symbol too Catholic for our sins

Rainbows begin with red
and so we begin
Eager for the purple of passion
of coming slowly into euphoria
we move on to a Singapore Sling
but the Kool Aid sweetness lingers
like old-wanted lovers
bitter on our tongues
Tastebuds washed with Margaritas
We watch David Karesh on the tube
our mind turned
and driven into resistant surface
by Screwdrivers. Here are the forgotten
characters of our childhoods,
of the Flannery O'Connor story never written—
a one-armed man, three-legged dog,
and recovering cheerleader in a wheelchair
with her "AIDS FREE" certification displayed.

Money grows spare
as the anorexic girl
drinking ice water by the pool table
We drink the flat amber of cheep beer
and watch her
face highlighted by the orgasm of pinball
machine player by her girlfriend
her blonde hair stiffened
with mousse of fear,
of anticipation of the man married
to a dozen women and a god
who he swears has told him to fill young wives
as the day they burn for the fifth time
on the two o'clock news.
We watch and hear their screams
in our own, notice the hottest point
is red that dissipates to orange and yellow.

Strawberries

Bob Loewe

A conversation burbled
between champagne and strawberries
in a quiet pre-morning dream.
The alarm goes off
causing her to fade into day
and me to slap the snooze
stare at the hair on my toes
drink coffee from the pot
and remember
how the moon's cast off rings
crashed through my window
and landed in a hundred pieces
of diamond and silver on the tile
waking that person in me again.
The one that remembers
how her nails tickled
passed up and down
my shoulders, or how we slept
contortioned in a braid
her fingers on my chest
and her leg across my stomach
her skin hiding the scars.
The coffee isn't working
so I lie back - eyes closed
and imagine her waking now.
She shakes out her hair
presses a finger to my lips,
tucks my moustache up my nose.
Closing my eyes
she tells me not to worry
about homicidal threats,
trials, blown freeze pugs.
I hunch under the blankets
contortioning solo
and slide slowly back
Ah! Strawberries.

Strawberries Revisited or Six Years Later

Bob Loewe

Slim resistance as berries part
over the high-carbon blade set
in a cherrywood handle pressed to palm

by two little fingers.
Thumb and first finger manipulate the fruit
in a practiced one-handed motion to let fall
the bruises of callous fingers into pulpy heaps
smeared over stuttered letters
on an extra copy of love-oatmeal
I read "Strawberries"

and what the hell was I thinking?

The last berry lands
amid corn flakes and wheat germ
the fall sounded
by crumbling leaves raked this morning
into toasted piles

Skim milk next, and and the remembrance of
two women

duplicitous opposites
white and toasted
searched my desk for morsels
lapped the poem up
and licked the cream from cheshire smiles

The poem sticks to the pulp
and syrup on finger tips
so I wash the patent symbol
from beneath fingernails

and we never drank champagne

strawberries lie
so I step back to the table
and let the cold seep through
my fingertips from the dull
utility of the spoon

Today on Donahue

Maria Mellinger

I dreamed I was on Donahue.

"Okay, we're back from commercial. We're talking to women who have had affairs, and some of 'em liked 'em!" He turns to me. Women in the audience raise their hands like an angry advanced math class with all the answers. They raise their hands and lower their brows.

"Uh, well, Phil," I stammer, "all I'm saying is that an affair isn't necessarily a bad thing. It can fill a void or fill a few weeks. It's experience. It can give you poetry and paintings, photographs. It can safely remove you from a painful situation until you're healthy enough to go home and fix what's wrong..."

"Don't you love your husband?" It was a great chorus, the single most important question.

"I love my husband," I answered. The audience expected adjectives. "But do you love him like crazy?" "Is he your whole life?" "Would you die for him?"

"I love my husband," I repeat, and I thought, that's all the explanation they need. But in my mind I ran down their checklist: yes, I love him like crazy, because he drives me crazy, he's the lunatic asylum I live in; no, he's not my whole life, because I had a life before I met him and I kept it, unlike the long suffering medical student's wife who works at McDonald's and telemarketing to pay for his education while daydreaming about her day, which keeps getting postponed and eventually never happens because now the mail comes addressed to Dr. and Mrs. Jones; would I die for him? I'd die without my own life.

"You're selfish!" a woman shouts. "My husband cheated on me and women like you are sluts!"

I failed to see the connection and answered, "I didn't sleep with husband, ma'm,"

"Well, I had an affair," cried another, "and it was painful."

"And you would say to the women at home,'don't do it,'" said Phil.

"And I would say to the women at home, 'don't do it,'" answered the woman.

"But it's not all painful," I add. "It wasn't painful when you first saw him, when he saw you, when he said you were beautiful and creative. When you fought with your husband and this other held your hand, that didn't hurt, did it? It didn't hurt when you felt the excitement building: Will he kiss me? Will he touch me? Will we take off all our clothes or do it right here in his car? God, I'd never done it in a car before and not having that experience hurt, hurt when he wrote me letters and put flowers in my mailbox and gave me authors every day for my research. It hurt when I went home and didn't get those things there..."

"And what about your marriage vows?" Phil asks. "Love, honor, obey?"

"We didn't take those vows," I admitted. "My marriage means so much to me, but it's not above criticism. We exist together on so many levels: sexual, spiritual, emotional, financial, intellectual, artistic, experimental. I don't feel that I've cheated on my husband if I take a new direction in my education. It's not cheating if I pursue new female friendships. It's far from cheating if I take a second job for our financial goals. He would not accuse me of artistic adultery if I started crocheting potholders instead of writing plays. So why is there so much focus of the sexual aspect of marriage? Why is the entire venture a failure if my genitals touch another's?

Oh, they're restless, now. Amid the interruptions I add, "I have research to back this up. Gay Talese. Anais Nin. John Lennon's lost weekend. The plots of every afternoon soap. People get past this, believe me."

Hushing an older woman calling me a "chippy," Phil the philosopher asks, "What is marriage?"

"Some say it's outdated, a plot by the patriarchy to keep women from experiencing life and pleasure. A lot of its concepts are ancient history: arranged marriages, dowries, the one income family, stay at home mothers, white picket fences and meatloaf in the oven, monogamy..."

"What do you think marriage is?"

"It's an agreement. 'You're the one I want to be with for the rest of my life. Let's try to be friends.' Marriage solidifies the initial bond with joint checking accounts and a mortgage, parenthood, and weekend trips. I don't want to grow old with any other man I've slept with. My husband is my lifelong partner."

"But I must keep stressing there are diversions in this plan. We're on a long highway together and we have to visit rest stops for the energy to continue. The five hour phone conversation I had with a lover gave me the stamina to do a sink full of dishes, grade my student's homework, put a lasagna in the oven, and massage my husband when he woke from his nap. We discussed some of the very ideas the phone lines had just transmitted. We shared a beautiful afternoon that might have been ordinary without someone else's impetus."

"Tramp!" someone shouted.

"Marriage is sacred," said another.

"So I'm assuming it was a sexual thing," said Phil, "and nothing more."

"Oh, no," I answered, wondering if he had been listening up to this point, or if no one could really fathom what I was saying. "It started out as a crush. I teach sophomores. I've been socialized with sixteen year olds. When I saw a beautiful boy in my Mark Twain class at the community college, I felt just like those girls in the corner desks I'm always collecting notes from: 'Do you think Tony is cute? Yes or No.' I knew of no other way to deal with my attraction."

"But you're an adult," Phil reminds me.

"A naive adult, yes. I met my husband when I was sixteen. That was a crush, too, but it was mutual. He wan twenty-one then, already in art school, extremely intense. We dated on the sly because of our ages. I never went to a dance or a prom. I skipped all the football games and parties. My friends then thought it was all so romantic, but I see now I've missed out. I never got those experiences. When the kids in my class get their dance pictures back after a long weekend, I can't understand their excitement. I can't relate."

"So you pursued this crush in an attempt to recapture your lost youth?"

"Well, no, not initially. I just stared at him. Wrote about him. Thought about him religiously. Went home faithfully. But when we were sort of thrown together by a mutual friend in class, I realized here was my chance to experience another. We made out in the parking lot, my first time ever. When I passed a senior couple in the school lot the next day, I felt a shiver of pleasure. I'd done that, too."

"But surely things progressed," said Phil.

"Not that semester. And I forgot about him when I took the summer off. Then, that fall, in Graham Greene class, it started all over again. And it progressed, in stops and starts, until we had sex in his car. Twice. Then it faded away again..."

"And you claim this wasn't just sexual?"

"Right. We helped each other with our term papers. We laughed. He was twenty, still hanging out with high school friends, and we all drank beer in the empty lot of their old school, throwing cans and bottles at the bad teacher's windows. Back at my school, if I kicked a Bud can out of my way Monday morning, I thought, 'Okay, cool. I've done that now, too, and it explains all the broken glass by old Mr. Palatine's window."

"I felt this real urge to help him. I wanted to pay his tuition I wanted to buy his books or his Pepsi between classes. He was helping me in a way I couldn't explain. I wanted to do something tangible for him..."

Hands were going up like firecrackers. "Phil! Phil!" shouted a few of the more opinionated, needing, desperately needing to pick apart my theories.

"Don't you feel the need to do something tangible for your husband? Like maybe be a good wife?" said an articulate one. At least she was able to form complete sentences.

"You're just a whore," said another, but Phil quieted her.

"I think you should know that Jesus will forgive you-" started the next in line, and Phil hushed her, too.

"I don't see how you can defend this," began yet another and Phil stood poised, ready to rip the microphone away if necessary. "When you marry, despite whatever new age vows you take, you make a commitment to one person. When things go wrong you try to fix them together. It's supposed to be the two of you against the world. You don't need anyone else. Ever."

"But wait!" I was angry now. "What is so wrong with going outside your marriage, briefly, for the attention you need? For the experience your husband can't provide? For an investigation into the void inside you, not us?"

"Let's say you're best friends with Martha, but you always go for coffee and talk about your kids. Every time you try to talk about a play, Martha give you a little lecture about what's important in life and moves on to discuss double coupon days. You're now tense with Martha. Things are strained. Maybe you get a little distant and Martha gets a little mad. Maybe you break off the friendship all together and deal with that terrible and unique loss.

"Or maybe, instead, you meet Benny, and she's funky and erratic and loves drama. You begin to tell Benny about the plays you've seen and the plays you're trying to write. She gives you inspiration, insight, comedy, and wild arguments about No Exit. You feel so alive with this new friend, who can easily talk in the college cafe, rushing down a crowded street, on the bus, not just over coffee. You are happy."

"And when you see Martha, you don't have to talk about plays. You save it for Benny. And you're happier telling Martha you got a $4.99 Tide refund, because you have Benny, too."

"But your marriage license doesn't say 'and Benny, too,'" quips and older woman, and Phil gives her a hug. "Slut," she mumbles as the hug ends.

I need some back up, here. It suddenly dawns on me I'm the only guest on the show today. There's no one to help me with the intellectual debate. I'm alone in a mob of monosyllabic talk show fans, and Phil, the great feminist, is secretly thanking his lucky stars that Marlo is at home today. The hour is more like a lynching than an afternoon's entertainment for the bored housewife.

"What if the shoe was on the other foot?" asks a pretty lady in pearls. Oh, how I love cliche women. "What if your husband had an affair?"

"I would be hurt," I answered. "Devastated, really, but more so because he had these experiences before we were married, before we even met. He chose me over those experiences, just like I, a little later, chose him."

"By returning to him, you mean? Going home?"

"Yes."

"And men do it all the time," I stammering the weakest of defenses. "Men have wild and gaudy sexual experiences before, during, and after marriage. I never had any! I wanted some!"

The crowd oohs an ahhs. They want some, too. Mine, in wet and sloppy detail."

Even Phil asks, "and did you get these experiences through your affair?"

"Yes!" I confess as if on trial. "I did! And I got it all out of my system and went home to my husband like The Diary of a Mad Housewife. I followed the rules, in the end. I didn't run off to an artist's cabin in the woods to paint pinecones. I came home."

This confused them. They still wanted wild and gaudy sex descriptions.

"And your husband was okay with this?" asked Phil.

"Healing." I said. "Not okay. Things weren't okay to begin with. We're getting better."

The audience seemed to accept this.

How would they have groaned, risen against me, tied their apron strings into the hangman's noose if I told the truth? My husband didn't know. My college crush didn't know I slept with the professor, too. Nobody knew that I was contemplating extramarital excitement even now, with the substitute filling in since Mr. Palatine's heart attack.

"And you would say to the women at home," said Phil, "'have an affair.'"

"I would say to the women at home, have experiences. See plays alone. Go to the movie he hates. Read. Visit the zoo in a downpour. Eat peanut brittle for breakfast. Play craps, at least once. Go dancing. Take classes. Wear strange shoes, mix-match your socks. Keep pretty rocks you find while walking. Shave the back of your head so your regular hairstyle hides it, dye it lots of different colors. Pierce or tattoo something. Buy shiitake mushrooms and multivitamins. Go on balancing the checkbook and paying the mortgage, but make candles, too, or beaded bracelets, pony tail holders, vegetarian meals. Buy baby shampoo and steal toilet paper from fast food restaurants. Vacation. Enroll in a workshop, on anything from breast feeding to better bongo playing. Try a new birth control. Try a new deodorant. Read a book at a bar, or better yet, back at the craps table. Order the tiramisu. Spend the night outside your home, be it in the back yard, at a hotel, or in your car. Cut your nails short. Volunteer at the hospital, the abortion clinic, the prison, for Christ sake. Wear a baseball hat. Bicycle. Borrow clothes. Stop shaving your legs. Paint your ceiling with a great big sun-"

"We have to go to commercial."

"Don't settle for the status quo. Don't believe the beauty myth. Don't let your life dry up. I would say to the women at home, keep living, stay interested and stay interesting, do something. It doesn't have to be an affair, but don't let life pass through the filter of Phil Donahue and General Hospital-"

"We have to go to commercial."

"-live it yourself. Experience it. Sing about it... What I can't emphasize enough... What I can't find the words for... is how the affair was worth it, how it made everything okay. It's a paradox, I know, but so much of life is. We gain strength from sickness. We live in the face of death. We love with the risk of losing it all..."

"We have to go to commercial." The Donahue music started and the audience simply stared at me.

I woke up.

and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft

Maria Mellinger

And when he told me he was getting a divorce,
I was at the furnace.
The heating company had just called and I was caught for
maybe the

fifth time this year with a fix-up that would involve anything
from
angel dust in the attic to gargoyles in the gutters.
My husband and I
blew two to three weeks a year on minor household
catastrophes.
My best friend's marriage was coming to an end.
My own was uncertain.

Trumpet creeper vines cover the side of my chimney,
uncertain
and surprisingly old, not unlike the house itself,
the furniture, the furnace.
I hated the vines, the octopus heating ducts and vents, what
catastrophes
saw through the wood steps and make cracks
in the foundation. I hate the
A-frame of it all, like a scarlet letter
with a mortgage attached that I,
star chamber tried and convicted, must wear.
Where did the affair come from?

Fallen from the rafters we replaced last fall?
From the winds that cry "from...
from..." as if they too, blowing through the hole
in the bedroom window, were uncertain
to experience this revelation, this remodeling,
because my heart is a furnace
earth cannot cool, consuming lovers and useless language
like "no," "the,"
"and," or "but?" Little words never passed my lips.
Only adjectives. Catastrophes.

He loves me like my husband loves our castle's catastrophes.
Was apartment living so bad? Where did the affair come from?
Given, this old house isn't exactly PBS.
The windows whisper "the, the, the"
when the newspaper blows out of the three inch crack.
Uncertain
key holes wind at my visitors.
Lovers cough like an old furnace
of ragged repair. My husband just hammers;
he's the nail in he and I.

The divorce of someone I'm dating doesn't mean
I'll pull out the nail of him and me.
Shaft smoke pours from the floors. The heating man speaks
about catastrophes
of forgotten filters and dog bones in the ducts.
He kicks the furnace,
the tool box, the hammer my husband left out. And I, from
bottomless loneliness or sheer comedy, kiss the guy.
It's an uncertain
pit I've just thrown myself into.
I hear the windows whisper "the, the..."

He just laughs. "My boyfriend is getting a divorce,"
I explain.
The opened conduit for air does not aid conversation. And I,
the housewife, get my husband's checkbook to dismiss this
uncertain
shaft of light in the home repair business. The catastrophes
of home improvement don't really interest me. Marriage, from
the furnace's viewpoint, means two people to heat.
So Zen, that furnace.

Bottomless loneliness and uncertain boyfriends are
the catastrophes of my life.
Pit me and marriage against the he and I
and it's a Biblical revelation.
"And from the shaft rose smoke
like the smoke of a great furnace."

So Why Were You Holding Her Hand?

Maria Mellinger

He held her hand
while mine rested on
a dictionary.
I looked up <u>epistemology</u>
by accident:
limits of knowledge.
Maybe he loves her.
They might
share some connection
because both
wear watches
on their right hands.
He thought
he loved me
because we made love,
but that was just bodies.
These are words.
<u>Beadle, beadsman</u>:
the one who kept
order in a church
and the one
who was hired
to pray.

He thought we
were connected
by candles.
He held my hand, once.
I can not
keep order or
earn minimum wage
to pray.
My knowledge is
limited.
I thought I loved him, too.

NAKED INSPIRATION

Bob Misiurewicz

If you saw me right now you would laugh.
I mean I just now stepped out of the bath.
But I couldn't resist to try writing like this
so inspired in my nude aftermath.

I sat down at my desk and began
With my trusty old mouse in my hand
I felt free without clothes from my head to my toes
yet a bit like a dirty old man.

It's so cozy and warm in my chair Vinyl sticks where
it's bare
As I peck at the keys and stare down at my knees
I proceed with a smug laissez-faire

I wonder if Shakespeare were here
Would he think naked writing is queer.
or would he give voice to the freedom of choice
and re-write a nude scene for Lear

As I finish this rhyme I admit
Writing nude frees my mind quite a bit
But don't try this at home, unless your alone
Or your wife may think you've had a fit.

The Big House

Ralph W. Mlaska

Chapter One

I'm thinking back many years to Northlake, of vast fields before Shopping Malls, and when you still could watch fresh meat being cut the way you wanted from a mom and pop butcher shop. The big house was built by my Grandfather and (Him). A simple non-pretentious white painted house that sat quietly against a backdrop of tall ancient elms and weeping willows that swept the ground with each puff of wind.

Only men lived there, my Grandfather, and three uncles, Bill, Ed, and Rich, (when he came home from the army on leave), and of course (Him). A family tradition started that is carried on today. That is, if you are unlucky enough to get married, you only do it once. No matter what happened or why it didn't work, never do it again. My Grandfather pointed out, "Only a damn fool would go back for seconds."

Looking at my family today, both men and women, it seems that lessons stuck deep in their psyche.

In those bright and sunny days my small young mind raced to learn new things. Driving people crazy with questions about everything. Trying to make a connection between information and understanding. I loved visiting here, being a city kid this was the closest I could get to the country. But I also had to learn to live with the fact that an evil thing lived upstairs. My mother always gave me stern warnings, "Don't go up stairs for any reason. Make sure you stay down stairs where you belong!" That was a tall order for a small kid that wanted to explore the world. I always obeyed, except for this summer. This summer I will know about (Him), the person that haunted the second floor. That mystery, who's name was never spoken, a devil who made my Grandfather jump when he would pound hard and rapidly on the upstairs floor with his axe head carved cane that only was seen on rare occasions.

In the car I thought about Rick, the lion-hearted, who would be at the house waiting for me. Of all the people in world I wanted most to be like my appointed mentor. I loved them all but Rich was always special; and I was his understudy that not only wanted to learn all the lines but had to mimic each movement. Rich was the champion at cursing, beer drinking and spontaneous weird stuff. Mom threatened not to let me go when she found out that he'd be there. "The only reason you two get along so well is that he is still your age, he'll never grow up, and I can't do a damn thing with you after you've been with him." She said. She gave in but I had to promise that I wouldn't come back smoking and cursing.

In those early days of life I was called Dink. But not by Rich, the others used the lame excuse that it was to confusing for them having two Ralphs in the same house. Not that any of them would

dare call their father by his first name. Bill was the worst and he took it one step further. It was my habit of watching Gumby in the mornings, so Bill attached Gumby to Dink calling me Gumbydink. It took a long time to shake that name, especially after the women picked it up and thought that damnable name was cute. Long after Bill had quite they were still at it. (I will never mention that name again in this story.)

Rich was working in the yard when we pulled onto the driveway. The car had hardly stopped when I through the door open and ran past his old 52 lead sled Pontiac that he had parked in the grass off to the side. Mom who was pregnant was wobbling behind me yelling something. I had gotten to his side first and that was all that mattered.

We started talking but I quickly felt a familiar pain that shot from the right side of my head. My mother had grabbed my ear and was lifting me to my tip toes and shaking her finger in my face. "Don't you ever get out of the car until I tell you!" She screamed. Then to drive the point home she pulled me up about three more inches causing me to stretch beyond human limits and added. "Do you understand me?"

"Yes Ma!" I yelled in between ow's and let go's.

Just when I thought my ear was about to rip off, her grip slipped causing a snapping sound from her fingers. When she was young she went to an all girls school called Lucy Flower. I think she majored in cooking, ear pulling, and shoe throwing. (Being the only person I ever knew who could throw a shoe around a corner.)

The three of us walked to the back porch. Mom and Rich were talking adult stuff. I think she was telling him not to give me any bad habits. At the left of the screen door was a mud sink, Rich took his shirt off to wash. I had never seen him without his shirt and was shocked! His body looked as if God had made a terrible mistake and had put him hastily back together with a Singer sewing machine. A single continuous thick red scar ran from the top of his shoulder down the center of his chest under his rib cage almost into his navel but turned sharply and followed his belt line to his back turning up along his spine to his shoulder joining where it had started. I was horrified, but all of that was nothing compared to the blue-red concave scared skin that hung like a swirl of blood gorged leaches attached at the center of the right part of his chest.

I believe that this was the summer when colors faded into the stark reality of grey shades. An opacity that would cover the simplicity of the world that was about to be lost forever. The most complicated thing that I knew at that time was that there were two dimes. A lady dime and the Spencer Tracy dime. I was convinced for along time that Spencer Tracy was the president of the country. After all only presidents were on money. I could never explain the lady. We went into the house last thing that mom had said to Rich was "Be his uncle, not his playmate." She kissed me on the head and even kissed her brother on his head.

I sat at the kitchen table watching her drive away with my suitcase still in the trunk of the car. Rich took a beer from the fridge, sat down and lit a camel.

"Want one?" He asked, pushing the pack in my face.

"No I'm to little for smoking." I said.

"Good! Don't ever start, these things will kill ya. How about a beer?"

"Sounds good to me." I said.

He reached in the fridge and pulled out a beer. Filled up a glass half way.

"You're too young to drink out of a bottle, as your adult uncle I'm telling you this so that you never look like a slob in public." He said jokingly as he put the glass on the table.

"When do you go back to the Army?" I asked him.

"Ralph, I'm not in the Army. Haven't been since before you were born.

"Mom always talks about you being in the Army. Where do you go all the time?"

"I'm staying at a military hospital called Hines." He answered.

I pointed to the concave swirl on his chest. "Did the hospital do that to you?"

"No not that one, a fucking Nazi played mumbley-peg with his bayonet on my chest. The doctors did these." He followed the train track with his finger to the point where he couldn't reach his back. "This is where they had to take my lung out."

He started a laugh that ended in choking. In between chokes he puffed on his cigarette, his head turning dark red looking as if it was going to explode. This was a sight that I had never noticed before, but now that my attention was directed to it, I would witness countless times in the future.

"Why didn't Nazi like you?" I asked, as if it was one person.

"It was war, and Nazis are Germans. A race of people not just one." He answered.

"Why did you fight the Germans? We are Germans, ain't we?"

A stern look came over his face and his eyes glossed over with hate. "No! Not anymore, were Americans. And if anyone ever asks, you tell them that your American. We don't have anything in common with those crazy sons-of-bitches over there. You remember that!"

I didn't understand but Rich told me and that was the way it was going to be.

"What's all this army stuff anyway?" He asked not allowing me to answer. "Let me tell you something. Your Uncle Bill is the hero in this family, if that's what your thinking. He fought in Korea from the start to the finish."

The old Grandfather clock bonged its usual three times. A terrible deep sound not at all cheerful like the musical chimes of the newer clocks that I had seen in the department store. Rich looked at his watch.

"Oh shit! I got to get the supper ready, why don't you go in the living room and watch TV for a while."

Until I went into the living room I had forgotten how clean this house was kept. I was the dirtiest thing in it.

"Everything has a place and everything in its place. We bachelors don't have time for nonsense." Bill had once told me.

I watched a cartoon show for about a half hour when the pounding started. It was just a few light raps at first, then a short pause and a few more raps a little harder and faster. Another pause then the pounding turned rapped, hard and continuous and didn't stop. Rich came from the kitchen with a food tray that had soup, coffee and bread on it.

"I'm coming!" He shouted as he ascended the stairs.

The top of the hall was short and partly blocked by a wall. The very end of a telephone table could be seen. The pounding didn't stop until he laid the tray on that table. On the way back he stopped at the top of the stairs looking at a picture that I couldn't see from the bottom.

"If you don't get this piece of shit no good cock-sucking-crap off the god damned wall, I'm not going to bring you any more food!" And added, "I don't give a fuck if you starve!"

He came back down the stairs. His foot falls heavy. Even through the carpeting I could feel angry vibrations. After he went back into the kitchen. I think I could just hear a slight low laugh that caused me to turn my attention to the end of the telephone table and watch the food tray slip quietly out of sight.

Ed came home first, dirty and tired. He walked in the living room and said, "Hi, Dink! What's going on?"

Without waiting for an answer he clicked the television knob to another channel. The Texaco guys were singing a slogan and wiping a windshield of a car. They claimed to be a men behind the star, but I knew that distraction belonged to Matt Dillon. Then the six o'clock news came on.

"That cartoon crap will turn your brain to peanut butter." Ed said.

He quickly left the room and went into the bathroom to take a shower.

Then Grandfather came in heard the shower running.

"Damn he beat me home again!" and in the same breath "Hi, Dink! How you doing?" He reached over to the channel changer and flicked it back to the cartoons that I was watching. "Why don't you watch something you want to see?"

Rich came out from the kitchen, and before he could say anything Grandfather snapped at him.

"What the hell ya making the kid watch the news for?" Then he turned and went into his room.

Rich just stood there for a second with his mouth hanging open looking at me. I shrugged my shoulders, Rich went back into the kitchen.

In this house everything followed a pattern. First wash, then eat, then talk. There was no talking at the table unless it was please pass this or please pass that or possibly excuse me for some reason.

We sat at the table eating, everything was quiet except for the occasional sounds of forks and knives that the silence amplified into a noisy racket. Then a thump, thump, thump, on the ceiling above us. Grandfather snapped to attention and looked up, but before he could respond further. Thump, thump, thump, in the short pause Rich said, "I don't know what he would want? I took him his supper." Rich started to get up. Then thump, thump, thump, thump without stopping.

"I'll get it, sit down." He told Rich.

The thumping didn't stop until he reached the upstairs room. We could hear muffled talking but could not make out any of the words.

Grandfather returned to the kitchen with the empty food tray, then filled the ceramic coffee pot from the percolator and went back upstairs.

Rich washed. Ed and I dried.

"Damn!" Ed said. "You use every stinking pot and pan in the house when you cook."

I found a small sauce pan under the sink. "Here's one you missed." I said jokingly.

"I was looking for that. Where did you find it?" Rich said laughing.

"Bill's at the corner pub drinking his supper, and I think I'm going to join him in some suds when we finish here. You gonna come?" Rich asked Ed.

"No not tonight, got to much homework I gotta finish."

"I'll have a couple for ya." Rich said.

My Grandfather and I played dominoes and I told him about mom taking off with my clothes.

"She won't remember unless she gets a flat tire and finds them in the trunk. But I think I have enough from the last time I visited." I said.

"Well, probably, but your still going to need a new suit." He said.

He went to the wall phone and made a call, then returned to the game.

"Mr. Horwitz will be here in the morning to measure you for a suit. Make sure you take a shower before he gets here." He told me.

I slept on the hide-a-bed in the living room. Bill came in late and woke me up.

"Hi, Uncle Bill!" I said.

He just grumbled something and staggered into his room. I fell back to sleep but was awakened a few hours later by my Grandfather and Uncle Ed. They were acting strange, tip toeing around the house. Grandfather had a bat in his hand and Ed seen me sit up.

"Shhh, be quiet, there's someone in the basement." He whispered. I sat there watching them disappear into the darkness that led into the kitchen. I could hear the door to the basement slowly creek as it was opened. A soft glow of light shot under the kitchen

door, I knew that they had turned on the basement lights.

There was a scream, a god damn and a what the shit all at the same time. Ed came into the living room belly laughing so hard he couldn't stand and flopped in a chair. I got up to go and see what was going on.

Ed could hardly talk but he did tell me to stay put. There was a girl crying and Rich yelling 'Okay, Okay'. Grandfather was really giving him hell about something.

"This ain't no god damn whore house, get that pig out of here!"

"What the hell am I supposed to do. I can't get none in the hospital and I can't bring it home!" Rich yelled.

"Go to her damn house!" Grandfather answered.

"Hell! Her old man wouldn't go for that shit!" Rich yelled.

"You mean she's married!?"

Before there was an answer I heard a smack! Then the back screen door slammed shut.

"Someone got wacked upside the head." Ed said grinning from ear to ear.

He came in from the kitchen, stone faced. Every muscle holding tight so that he wouldn't laugh. But his eyes gave him away, they were laughing. And I knew that whatever Rich had done it wasn't that big of a thing. But then the pounding started. His face relaxed into a natural old tired look. His laughing eyes looked spent. He didn't say a word but turned and slowly walked up the stairs.

"Go to sleep now." Ed said as he turned off the light.

The Dean Street Fire

Ralph W. Mlaska

When they tore down the old light company, Casey was there looking through his wire rimmed glasses for pieces of brass or aluminum that he put into his shopping cart. Not knowing or caring what was in the glass that they made those old mercury bulbs. When the broken pieces cut his hands he never gave it a second thought. Garbaging always cut his hands, it was a fact that he was accustomed too. After a few weeks when his fingers went numb and the cuts wouldn't heal, he didn't give that much thought either.

His mind was burned out from the wood-grain alcohol he occasionally found behind the paint store. Actually, it was planted by the stock boys who thought it was funny watching the old bum drink the poison straight from the bottle. He was little more than a slug moving from place to place without any thought of the world around him. Living in an old olive-drab army Great Coat that he found someplace, never taking it off even on the hottest summer days. He loved that coat almost as much as the pair of white golf shoes that he found. Old strips of dirty t-shirts served as bandages that he wrapped around his hands. Fresh red stains worked quickly through the layers. Some days he didn't smell as bad as others, it depends on what was thrown in the garbage that week.

A bent squeaky wheel on his cart and the cleeting sound from the spikes on those shoes made a certain rhythm as he passed through our alley.

He made his rounds through the neighborhood and at eleven-thirty everyday. Slowly walking through the playground where squeaky chains on the swings competed with his wheel. Being just a harmless eyesore, not any kind of threat to anyone made him an easy target for the do-gooder's and the better-than-thou's. They never offered him more than lip service and those that tried to do more always gave up bitterly disappointed. Money or anything of value went for a bottle or ripple or another type of cheap wine.

The young and old busy-bodies who should have known him by now, packed together like canines protecting their young and barking curses at his passing.

"Stay away from our kids ya smelly old bum! If you go by my kid I'll kill ya!" were the nicest things that they had to say.

Their children were afraid, not that he had ever harmed them, mothers are good teachers when emotional lessons need to be taught. He ignored their howling by not acknowledging them with so much as a glance and just squeaked his way slowly through the park.

Everyday following the same path that took him to the same trash cans and abandoned houses that he had picked clean months before, and the same people that he never gave any notice too. Always walking with a slow pace hunched over like he had a broken back looking down as if he had dropped his life and couldn't find it.

Seldom did he hold his head up and show his face. He looked at me once, or should I say through me? His glassy bloodshot eyes sunk deep in his head made me wonder if there was anything behind them. In a very real way his thin frame appeared to fragile to be alive. We must have seen each other a hundred times and never spoke one word between us. I don't think anyone ever did except the old bags that bitched him out at the park.

He started his morning rounds down the Milwaukee Avenue alley trying to beat the garbage trucks that followed close behind. When he turned the corner onto Dean Street, he saw the two story frame house burning. He stood there for a moment mesmerized by the low blue flames that shot occasionally out of the small basement windows. His brain sputtered and spurted like an old car trying to start on a cold January morning. A connection must have been made because he slowly pushed his cart across the street and stopped on the sidewalk in front of the burning house.

"You better wake up in there!" he said in a voice so low and scratchy that if anyone had heard him they would think that he was talking to himself.

"Come on! Come on! Wake up in there!" he yelled almost in a normal talking voice.

His hands hurt like hell, the slightest movement caused the cuts to crack open and bleed. He managed to rummage through the papers and cans in his cart and grab a piece of pipe he was saving.

He hesitated for a second not wanting to loose that valuable piece, but some how he found it within himself to throw it. A gingerly pitch, falling short, it clanked on the cement sill striking the glass and only making a crack.

He hated fire; it terrified him, and when the black smoke started oozing from the door and windows he lost what little senses he had. Running around in tight small circles like one of his feet was nailed to the sidewalk, flapping his arms and momentarily stopping to look up and down the sidewalk for help. Alone and confused, he knew that he had to do something, but he couldn't remember what.

He ran onto the porch and rang the doorbell, when nothing happened he went into a hopping fit. It would have been comical to any passerby who seen those small short hops that took him off the porch, across the sidewalk between two parked cars. He stopped and looked up and down an empty street hoping someone would come. For some reason, he didn't know why he unbuttoned his coat and let it slide down his arms. Still not sure of what he was doing he spent some time folding it neatly and putting it carefully in his cart. Moving toward the house he stopped and turned back. He took off his glasses and placed them on top of his coat, then walked back to the porch and tried the doorknob. It was locked. He pounded fiercely with both hands and left blood stains all over the door. Only the crackling of the flames answered his call. He climbed off the porch onto the concrete ledge that led to the front window.

Fat Nelly Berns lived across the street and was cooking her eight egg and half pound of ham breakfast. After popping in four pieces of bread in the toaster, her attention turned to the pork-chop left over from last nights dinner. On her way to the refrigerator she happened to look out of her kitchen window.

"Oh my God! Oh my God! What is that man up to?" she yelled. She tried to open the window but her chubby fingers wouldn't fit under the handles. Pounding her soft fleshy palms against the top of the frame, it broke free from the layers of paint that held it closed. Sticking her neckless head out of the window she yelled out to him.

"Don't go in there! I'll call the Fire Department."

Her voice caused him to look around and lose his footing. The weight of his thin body crashed through the glass. Falling to the floor, the fire burned around him and hung onto the curtain that was wrapped around his head. He jerked the cloth off and stomped out the flames. As if his stomping awakened it, the beast showed its full size shooting from the floor to the ceiling sucking in fresh air in a rush and belching out gasses into his face.

Casey moved back pinned to the wall with his eyes closed expecting to be consumed at any second. A fiery appendage licked across his body tasting his exposed flesh, then disappeared. The air felt suddenly cool, so he slowly opened his eyes and only saw flaming firelings dancing their way across the leaked gasses of the living room rug.

As quick as he could move to the stairway the flames grew behind him forcing him up and cutting off any hope of retreat back down. A finger struck out at the bottom of his leg then pulled away leaving a sibling behind burning into his pants. He beat it out with the palms of his hands. The quick burning polyester liquified, stuck to his leg and bandages burning deep into his calf and the open cuts of his hands.

He raced up the stairs, his thin walled heart pounded surging blood through his head, and he felt as if it was going to burst. The animal roared ahead in a gaseous fit exploding at the top of the landing and trapping him on the stairs. He threw his arms around his head covering his face and charged into the flaming belch that shot out at him at the same time. Pushing through the angry ignition if nipped furiously at his hands and ears as if it had the ability to sense Casey's week spots. He stumbled past the monster that blistered his fingers and burned the bandages off.

His blistered hands were not able to grab the doorknob, so he used his wrists to rotate it. When the door opened a little he jammed his foot in the opening and kicked it open the rest of the way. Towels and blankets tumbled to the floor. The animal pounced on them, devouring and melting in a feeding frenzy and quadrupling in size. Then guiding up into the open closet and bursting out in a gorged rage splitting itself and spiraling in the center of the hall.

Casey fell back trying to avoid the intense heat that singed his eyebrows and the bottom of his lip. Flames were crawling up the wall bubbling the paint, then bursting open like mini-volcanoes, spewing out gases, encouraging the fire toward the ceiling and forming a blazing tunnel that sucked air so fast it made a humming sound.

Casey tried to open the next door but his wrists kept slipping from the strong spring that snapped the knob back. The fire was wild and flashing at him. He had no time left to fool around. His blistered hand grabbed and twisted, ripping open the skin that stuck on the knob and covered it with fluid. It started to slip back, he tightened his grip and almost enjoyed the razor pain pulsing through his once numb fingers. The door opened slightly, but before he could get his foot in position in invertebrate beast thundered with a blast of heat that caused him to let go. The door slammed closed again pushed by the sudden gust of pyromaniac wind that set the curtains aflame at the far end of the

hall. Casey nearly passed out, somehow he knew what he was looking for was behind this door. The animal was fighting too hard for this room to be empty.

He gently squeezed the fingers of his raw hand to make sure that they still worked. He lunged for the knob, it was hot; it wasn't just a second ago. He really didn't expect it but he held on and twisted again, flung the door open, rushed into the room and slammed the door violently behind him.

The beast was hanging on the ceiling like a giant iridescent opaque spider, pulsating in whites, blues, and reds, Casey's eyes pierced through the thin vale of smoke that was starting to fill the room. It was hard for him to see without his glasses, and cursed himself for leaving them behind. There were two cribs, one close to the other at the far end of the room. Without any thought, he plunged his hands into the closest one.

The scream welled up from his stomach wrenching through his alcoholic paralyzed vocal-cords straining in high pitches that vibrated through his jaw bones.

Blue flames sputtered jumping up the sides of the mattress. He looked at his hands in disbelief, they were covered to the wrist in melted plastic from the partly melted doll that laid in a gray puddle smiling up at him.

"God!" he screamed clamping his arms between his legs ripping skin and plastic off as he pulled back.

The reason for being there was almost lost in a mad flash of hysteria. He thought of making a mad dash and jumping through the closed window, taking his chances in the fall. But some part of his undamaged brain, (something long lost, the ability to think ahead of himself), held him fast. Roaring up and shooting tentacles out whipping at his feet, the animal had moved to block his way to the other crib. The pain had passed, it didn't matter anymore, his life didn't matter or the child's life. Nothing mattered except to defeat the monster or die in the attempt.

His hands were almost gone and he believed they were the only things that he had to make his living with. He thought he heard sirens or was it the beast howling at him, he wasn't sure. The animal split leaving a clear path to the other crib. Casey dashed across the room and stood over the crib looking in it. His hands were little more than useless hooks, but he knew that he had the baby by its weight. He rolled her harshly in a blanket and cradled her in his arms holding her tight to his chest.

The flames bit relentlessly at his arms trying to make him drop the screaming, kicking child. He pressed his face and arms against the wall keeping his back toward the flames, following the wall to the window. Knowing that if he broke the glass the beast would charge at the sudden gush of fresh air, engulfing the two of them. He wasn't able to move an inch back, the flames were shooting up behind him eating at the back of his plaid cotton shirt. He had to stand there and take it, there was no other choice.

A fireman saw him standing at the window and signaled to the truck to extend and rotate the heavy ladder toward the window with another fireman riding the end of it. The ladder was too slow and the beast too fast. Flames were rolling up and burning at the back of Casey's head. He couldn't stand it any longer, the ladder was under the window and rising at a pace that seemed to take forever.

With a final effort backed by rage he violently kicked out the window frame and dropped the baby into the fireman's arms. The monster immediately blew forward chasing the bundle down with bright red, yellow, blue, and orange flaming fingers falling short of the fireman who caught the baby, then turned up in a twisting angry spiral whipping across the roof followed by a thick greasy heavy black smoke that rose higher and higher flattening and staining the bottom of stalled white clouds.

A warm summer wind lifted an obnoxious odor off the old bums army coat as it filled the folds lifting a pair of glasses that slipped through the wire mess of the shopping cart, falling and shattering against the sidewalk.

Her

Amy Nichols

There was a time when I knew her pretty well, but probably about three months before this happened I lost touch with her. I wanted to get to know her and be her friend because I thought she was really pretty. Quite a few people thought so. She had dark blonde hair. It really looked more brown, but when she would stand in the sun I could see the blonde. Her eyes were hazel. The color changed all the time. For instance, if she wore green, let's say, her eyes would look green. She had this pea green sweater she would wear with a hole in it. And, man, did her eyes match that sweater perfectly. Everyone would stare at her when she wore that sweater, and she would nervously finger that hole that looked like green hay sticking everywhere. I wouldn't say many people liked her. She was actually kind of snotty when you first looked at her or talked to her. Well, I wouldn't really say snotty. Probably, more shy because once I got to know here she was really nice and would probably have done anything for me. I liked her.

I first started noticing a change in her back in July. She had just broken up with this lunatic guy she thought she was going to spend the rest of her life with. He cheated on her and told her he wasn't "very much in love with her." It hit her hard, even though I think she knew the relationship wasn't going to last. But she always had to get what she wanted. And she would never give up. She used to say to me, "Everything I have ever wanted

I have gotten, and even if I don't get something I said I wanted, it doesn't mean that I haven't gotten it, it just means that what I want changed." She was rather complex. Friends, acquaintances, people thought she was crazy. I don't think she was. I think she was just a complex person who couldn't find a place for all of her thoughts. She wasn't very organized, in my opinion, and I mean mentally. Otherwise, she was the neatest girl I ever met. Somehow even when everything else was a mess in her life, her room would stay immaculate. She said to me once, "If my room is a mess, my head feels like a mess." But I think her head always felt like a mess, at least the last three months.

I think it's wrong to put blame on anyone. I mean I was practically her best friend, and I couldn't stop it. I know for a fact that the breakup with her boyfriend, the one I mentioned before, had a lot to do with it. When she was with him was the last time I saw her really happy. She really loved him. Probably the first time she had ever been in love. I don't know if he ever loved her much. After they broke up she would really only talk about how much she was going to win him back. She never did though. I mean, he would have sex with her once in a while, which I suppose was a momentary happiness sort of thing for her. They never were actually back together where he called her his "girlfriend." It was sometime after they broke up that people started making remarks that she looked crazy. We were at this party together on Halloween. There was a keg and a nitric tank. She did her first balloons there and loved it. Said it reminded her of what heaven would be. But at this party there was a guy who kept commenting on how crazy her eyes were. I could tell he was really interested in her, too, because he wouldn't stop staring at her. She never picked up on guys liking her though. The guy later told me he thought she was cute and seemed like a deep person. I told her this but she didn't believe me. She didn't have any interest in boys after her boyfriend broke up with her. I think in a way she was saving herself for him. Her mom asked me to go through her things and I found this poem or letter, I'm not sure what to call it, but it was for him:

> When I loved evil I told myself he would not overrule. Yet, her I am. Alone. But not wanting company. Lonely because I miss me. Forgetting more each day. Did I try to save you or did I just watch you slip through tears falling from eyes to cheek to tongue? Trapped behind my window. I can see you and you can see me but we cannot touch.
> Under. Dead hands. Take her.
> Please.
> Does he remember her eyes * three moon sparkle
> her smile * gaping wound.
> Remember?
> As you were dying...Miss.
> Did you ever see me cry?

I think it would be too easy to blame it all on him. She kept this in a little locked wooden box. The key was in the lock. I interpreted this as that she wanted someone to open the box and take out this little piece of paper with his name written in blue ink on the outside. She probably thought if he read this that he would realize how hurt she was from him, and maybe he would feel sorry for her. He wouldn't though. I know he wouldn't. I told her, her mother told her, my parents told her, her sister told her to leave him. All he gave her was a broken heart. I know why she liked him though. He reminded her of her father and her father loved him. And he loved her father. From what I know her father didn't love her much when she was a kid, but he had a midlife crisis or something, and his psychiatrist put him on prozac, and ever since he is like a new man. She didn't care though. The damage was done as far as she could tell. She needed that love from her father. She was just too stubborn to accept it. I think by loving her boyfriend it made up for the love she didn't get from her father. I don't think it's a crazy thing to do. Her father hurt her and giving him love probably made her feel insecure, like maybe he would be mean to her again. I don't know. She didn't tell me much about him. She did tell me her father bought canaries, and that really upset her. I guess her father started buying everything for the canaries, he would sit for hours looking at the canaries, he would whistle to the canaries. The canaries were her father's babies. She wasn't.

As far as her mother, she was a little strange. Smart woman who expected her daughter to be like her. I don't think she was very proud of her daughter. It was hard for her to accept that her daughter was into staying out late at night and going to parties. She wanted her to study all the time. She wouldn't though.

And then there was her relationship with me. I loved her and she loved me. I didn't expect this to happen. It's hard for me to talk about ... We were best friends even though we never put a label on our friendship. I met her at this restaurant I used to work at. She was sitting on a bar stool and she looked so pretty all by herself. Her hair looked especially brown and it was pulled up in a bun with wisps around her face. She was only wearing lipstick. She was wearing all black. Black was her favorite color and everyone commented on how she would always wear it. And her response was, "The reason all of my clothes are black is because then they will match with everything." People thought she was trying to look gothic though. She wasn't at all. No one really knew her. Not even me when I think about it. But her eyes back then, it was April, were so sweet and innocent. They were brown like maple wood and wrinkly and happy. God, did she look young back then. I was her waitress that night and we just started talking. We would meet for coffee after I got off work. We'd usually go to a little family restaurant and sit for hours and talk about everything. She would smile so much back then. Her lips were tiny, but she really had a beautiful smile. There was a small space between her two front teeth that she was self-con-

scious about and sometimes when she smiles she would put her pointer finger on her top lip to cover up, in her eyes, the imperfection. We stopped hanging out when she met her boyfriend. She devoted so much time to him. They only lasted two months, and it wasn't long before she started calling me. I could tell a difference right when we were hanging out again She was drinking wine most of the time. It was Riunite Soft Luscious Red. Her lips would turn hot pink from drinking so much of it in one night. Her eyes also looked worn out. She had dark circles under them. I told her she could talk to me. She did, but only when she was really drunk and there were always new plans on how she would get her "true love" back.

The last time I saw her she was sober. It was about two weeks ago. I almost didn't recognize her. Her hair was dyed black and she was wearing dark makeup around her eyes. The only thing that remained constant about her was that she was still wearing all black. I thought it was sweet because she was sitting in the same exact bar stool she had sat in ten months before. She was smoking her Benson and Hedges Menthols. She still looked sophisticated. I talked to her a little between customers, and she told me she wasn't talking to her ex-boyfriend anymore. She said she stopped wanting him. She said she was spending time with her grandmother. Taking her shopping and to movie. I really didn't know her anymore when she was talking. She wouldn't even look at me. She was always looking in the coffee cup in front of her or at the wall paper behind me. I was nervous around her that last time and I really didn't say anything to her. Before she left the restaurant she looked me dead in the eyes and said, "I love you." And for the smallest second her eyes were all wrinkled again and the space between her teeth showed off for me. I almost started to cry because it wasn't until that moment that I realized all of the damage that had been done to her, probably, for most of her life. And I'm not saying she was an exception and her life was more difficult than anyone else, but I think her complexity got out of line, or maybe her brain became too much of a mess, or she could have run out of fuel. I don't know.

She had told me she bought a wedding dress at an antique store. She said, joking around, that it was for the wedding of her and her ex-boyfriend. She might have had this in mind when she bought it, even though she used it for a different reason altogether. She was always a romantic and pretty creative with things, so I wasn't surprised when I got the call and the description. I guess she wore the dress and went out to that small concrete stage at that park near the river. Her and her ex-boyfriend spent their first date there. But that night the moon was full, and I imagine it was like a spotlight on the stage. I guess she first cut her wrists going toward her heart. A straight line. And then she cut sideways. I never heard how long it took her to die. I hear the blood was surrounding her little body. Some policemen found her. When they moved the body there was an outline of her on the cement of that stage. I went there the other night and could make out a skinny stained figure. I guess when the mortician stitched up her wrists for the wake, she had a cross on each. Just like her to have symbolism in certain places. She sent her ex-boyfriend a letter telling him to look at the moon to remember her. She said the moon reflected the white of the cement and the moon would reflect her one day.

I saw her shadow the other night against the moon. I look at the moon to remember her.

Deeper

Amy Nichols

I found her in a deep empty tear stained well hiding beneath tattered moth wings and silk worm wombs. Her pretty face was tilted to the heaven's moon where sleeping shadows kissed her reflecting silver white skin. The eyes of my angel were stuck shut by the dried crackling blood crusting her eyelashes, and her silent china white teeth were peeking from behind her lovely lace lips. She breathed a soft halo crying dreamless light half covered by the thick uneven wall of her well encasing her porcelain doll's precious body.

I wished to only slip a glance of this dark figure and continue tripping my trail existence. But I had crept to the point where three crushed bone white fingers extended. The proper direction of stars. The other fingers were crooked and broken at the joints and I was pretty breathing touched me from one of those fingers and compelled me to fake a turn in my path.

I rested my knees near the edge of the mouth of her world where she wept like a pretty pink tongue. "My dear," she cried, "take my hand."

Startled I fell back. How did she see me through her deep red covered eyes? Before I could question, her spider strand web delicate hands balleted to me through her empty shadows. I could only stretch my arms to reach her and her hole of life. Her tiny fingers braided through my warm hands I lifted her up and out of the shadows and she was in my world.

Under the night light I saw her more clearly. Her hair was like dead tree branches. Her skin was white and smooth like stone markings on graves. I opened her eyes and two oceans of blue crashed at my shore. Her lips trembled with fear while escaping gasps of air fogged over my eyes.

I washed away the blood that rimmed her eyes, combed out the dead tree branches tangled around her head, and blew away the remains of moth wings and silk worms. She spoke few words and when she did she spoke of a time with a different moon.

"I was loved in shadows once," she said, "and left there to die."

And when she said these words tears welled in her eyes but they were red tears of blood that trickled down her cheeks. I

looked in her blood stained-glass eyes.

"You are loved in my light," I said, "and that will never change."

But she only looked away when I said this. She seemed to look past my world to a distant place I could not see.

I loved my angel. At time she said she loved me although I knew something was missing from her life. I tried to find what that was. And one day I did.

I clipped off butterflies' wings with colors of blacks and blues. I collected fire flies extracting the most brilliant light.

"Close your eyes, my love," I whispered. With a needled I sewed on the flowers I connected the light from the fire flies and made a crown to place on her head. I walked her to a pool of water. "Open your eyes," I said.

She peered into the pool and something happened that had never happened before. The sides of her lips curved up to the heavens and her eyes sparkled like the stars.

"My dear, I thank you." she said.

As she said these words, her wings opened spreading their beauty and she flew into the sky with her crown lighting her path. Farther and farther away she flew leaving my world far behind. The dimmer her light became the more I sunk into the dirt beneath my spirit. Deeper. Deeper. Until I was looking up to the heavens from my hole in this world searching the stars for my beloved angel who left me where I found her.

I wait here for her to find me...

Amy Nichols

i am holding california in my hands
stolen from a state of mind
i heard the voices, spoken january,
and they will call again

in april the clovers of highway white
the stars crumble to crickets
screaming purple promises of time
can i will this to leave? not quite

california is calling from ashes in oceans
and cutting through september and metal
i pull my hat over to silence my senses
and remember the red heads that kept death in motion.

december called me to leave a message
saying we all have gone blind
i open my palms, two road maps for you
i am holding california in my hands, my love,
stolen from your state of mind.

Amy Nichols

i found a twig to twist a ring
for you and me, that day with trees
and marble of the graves
we curved into a trunk, into the wind of april
the branches creaked
"the trees are growing together" you said
and tongued my lashes and lines
"i have something i want to tell you" i said
and nailed my fingers over your arches
"i love you, i love you, i love you" i thought
but couldn't form the words
and look at your pretty eyes
"tell me" you pleaded
"i can't" i said "this is not the time"

branches grew together that april
in june they cracked and died.

Amy Nichols

When the jays fly back to corneas of blue
the X's return to part and trace
my hair in plaits.
look to the wares, our silver is setting
to broken reflections
pretending to care.

Amy Nichols

this scene is not mine
i seem to have drawn this face on a clock
indian sittings on rose beads we cross
the fan spins her webs in waves
july can be too kind
the cup is passed, i'm asked to sip
i lie to those who stare and flip through paper
i look to him
he asked me here
his fingers sprinkle over strings
i say i have to leave, to go
we bid out time through blinks
"it's only twelve o'clock" he says
i lean against my corner i've claimed

my head begins to sink in tears
i hide in shallow shadows while
he speaks to friends of killings
funny, i think, he hasn't realized i'm dead
i stand to step and turn the doors
"i'll walk you out" he speaks in slurs
"not necessary" i smile and wink
however, he follows me down the drive
my keys bell to fingers
"love yous," and all, this has to end.

Sara's Place, 1994

Amy Nichols

I had friends once. They were friends I could say anything to and not worry what they thought because we were all thinking about the same things. We were all at that confusing point in our lives that was facing every imaginable direction. I want to tell my memories because it is a lost time that needs to be remembered.

It was the summer of 1994. I called my friends, the Sara's Place crowd because that little truck stop on Route 6 was our hang out. I would like to mention every individual I encountered over coffee and cigarettes, but there are too many to name.

I will begin with Matt, because it is because of him that I became part of the Sara's Place crowd. Matt and I met and became infatuated and became a so-called couple, and through him I met all these people who would become my best friends. I remember at Bicentennial Park with the Stray Cats singing in the background and dancing with Matt dressed in 1950's bowling shirts and thrift shop wing tips and me with my flipped up, sun-dried, brown hair wearing sunset circled sunglasses. And everything was beat. Jazz was beat, smoking was beat, white t-shirts and jeans were beat, so we thought we were left over beatniks of the 1950's. Jack Kerouac was our god and writing was our favorite past time, so we carried around notebooks and pens at all times and sitting at a booth in Sara's Place with the yellow smoke-stained walls, we wrote about our dreams, our realities, our searches but always ended up in the same place drinking coffee. And even though my relationship with Matt only lasted three weeks we remained friends and we still jitter bugged and talked.

Then Jeremy would become my best friend for two weeks. His spirituality and astrological mind would overwhelm me, but the times I like to remember most are the ones on the stage at Bicentennial Park singing songs from Cabaret.

I started seeing Greg with our omenistic love that began in a cemetery drinking imported wine from Italy where the stars and the moon seemed to follow us everywhere. Smoking Dunhills from England, we thought we were very European, but all we did was read a script someone wrote for us that focused on death and suicide, and we ended because he was in search of a girl who looked like Winona Ryder, and I didn't fit the part.

Candace would enter my life. She was my long lost second cousin fresh out of New Jersey who smelled like salt from the ocean. We had our talks sitting on her apartment porch drinking Nestea with lemon with Tori Amos screaming in the background. Meeting at Sara's Place every night was our ritual taking in too much caffeine and nicotine.

And finally, the person I saved for last, my dear friend Jason with his red-red hair and blue-blue eyes. I am repeating myself because his image has raced through my mind an infinite number of unending times since his death February 4, 1995. I remember the time we went to Lake Michigan late at night and the cigarette smoke-gray puff dragged exhaled clouds filled the sky. And his backyard bonfires, where a train ran through with its spot-light illuminating our faces, giving us an angelic appearance while Jason and Matt hopped the trains, and I watched, too scared I would trip and fall over the tracks.

Staring at his black and white newspaper obituary eyes, smudged ink shading beneath my eyes, he said good-bye. I never said good-bye. I never say good-bye.

Jason left me warm and cold. Warm from the tears I cried for him and cold from the funeral where the February winter air enveloped my body as his lay in satin and oak. (We all gasped for the air. He stole from you, my dear.)

And so we buried our friendships, and we walked away from our Sara's Place days. We brought with us the memory of our pasts. I do not see or talk to any of my old friends from Sara's Place, but I think of them often.

"And so it is, for only a moment we visit this world...so live every second, for oh, so quickly our moment is gone."

Untitled

Amy Nichols

My feet on the wooden staircase.
Spiraled in heels.
Clicking up, up, up, the shiny planks.
I saw my reflection downward varnished.
Black smudged newspaper inked eyes,
Tiny, opened.
The pink shaking lips.
As tears cried and slide from eyes to cheek to chin.
To nothing.
Click, click, clicking.

On the landing played a cathedral organ.
The small lady bent on the bench.
Wore black. Nun black.
With skeleton skinny fingers.
Jesus Christ framed and nails clicking keys.
Fine tuned and broken hymn.

My breathing disappeared in little gasps.
Into the air.
The air thick of Titan smells.
Hiding in shadows.
Seeping under closed closet doors.
Tasted dying flowers on my tongue.
Think and dry rotten petals crumbled down my throat.
I swallowed the death.

The room. Outlined in wood.
Dark Mahogany.
I dragged through molasses.

Passed the rains that clicked my window.
Reigning down on me.
I assembled the whites above my head.
Built a birdcage.
Me.
Under.
Protected? I asked?
Beneath the bones.

At the box of wood.
Inside. Inside.
I did not lie.
Unfamiliar body.
His eyes are mine. Closed.
Hands placed over chest. Protected.
As my own heart.
I bowed and prayed.
For who?
He called me there.
"Sweet daughter. Sweet daughter."
I had no choice.
But to say good-bye.

In silence. Played the part.
Burning lips with blood.
Of the Father.
Drying tongue with flesh.
Of the Father.

As the lid closed.
Click click clicking.
They locked.
Him from me.
He is in darkness.
I am in light.
Shut and locked.

I climbed to attain Him.
I was too late.
My heels.
Cold and worn.
Toes broke through.
Splintered and scarred.
From the wooden staircase.
Clicking as I descended.
As I fall.
And end in wood.

Now I lie. Fine tuned and broken Him. I am.
Still beneath the bones of the Father.

boredom

Chris Patton

I mope at "work"
trying to look busy.
The faint florescent lights
sap the energy from within
my weary bones.
The customers drift by
searching for things
not sold on any shelf.
FOREVER
spreads out before me
as
time
starts
ticking
backwards.
And part of me fears,
I'm never going to get out of here.

Sleeping

Chris Patton

As I twist and turn,
tumbling into my dreams,
my thoughts shift to you.

Christ's Gang
Jimi Saieg-Chartrand

Spiders in the corners
log walls, bunk beds.
The morning like a blank sheet of
paper.
No mistakes,
No regrets.
God was there-
in the cold dew.
He walked with me.
Down to that canteen and
up on that stage.
I was the lost child.
He was within me.
No matter,
No use,
No hope-
They thought they knew-
Hey, they knew me-
the way they wanted to.
I was their conscience-
taunting with 'em all.
I call you loyal serpents-
lost and forgotten.

Dedicated to H.R. at CYC.

DIDO
Jimi Saieg-Chartrand

How many poets,
how many have been
lost within a rose.
How many intricately
woven minds-
how many thoughts have
whirled around the redness
of a rose.
The petals,
thin sheets-
like a dessert.
Light and weightless-
deep with color and craze.
Rigid and blunt
this delicate symbol.
I could not compare
human blood with anything else
but
the deepest, reddest
and
solemnly cracked rose.

Perpetual Cycle
Michael Sieder

My Dad wasn't much of a dad.
You see he was an alcoholic.
We didn't do the father-son things
like play ball or
go to a ball game or
even talk about sports.
When I look back at my time with my father,
good or bad.
There were some scary moments, but
he didn't really abuse me.
He would just pass out on the couch
every night at eight and
me and my sister would make fun
of his incoherent babblings.
At times it was quite entertaining,
but not really.
It hurts us more than we could understand.

I didn't have a dad
and I hated him for that.

The Blank Page
Michael Sieder

a great whiteness
pure unmolested
the driveway after the first snowfall
kids eager to play
the beautiful virgin on her wedding day
her lover full of lust
the spirituality of its complete void
lifeless yearning for life
a blackhole consuming all
matter substance meaning
a magnetic force sucking the words from
our souls

a vehicle in which we attempt to express
our true selves

this page was blank once

and i appreciated it for several moments
then the words overcame my patience
now it is filled with ideas and insights
thoughts that were floating around inside
no longer full of opportunity
can its potential ever be completely realized?
i think not
but not to worry
though this purity has been violated
the next page is also blank
and i'll try again.

Devil in Dance

Ann Sluis

He beckons with his questions,
His inquiries into my thoughts;
Taunting me with invisible emotions,
With a heart that can't be caught.
He confuses me with his endless talk
Of a life that he must live and walk;
Leading me to stars to only blind me by the sun,
Living a life disheartened never makes living fun.
He inspires me, yet drives me to my end,
Is he a player in a game, a joker, or is he just a friend?
He invites me with his smile and his sly bedroom eyes,
Infuriates me, an emotional tease in my head,
    with his casual lies.
He steps to the beat and tangos with my heart,
Then he steps on my toes and throws love on the floor;
And though, with a battered spirit, my soul is torn apart,
It seems I'm masochistic, because I still come back for more.
I can see it in his universal eyes,
That sparkle like a diamond in midnight skies;
He steps in time with my heartbeat,
Rocking my soul and my mind with his feet.
He drives me insane, with just one sideways glance,
Who would have ever known that he was the Devil in Dance.
He plays me like a puppet, pulling at the strings,
Teasing me with quite unattainable things;
He flirts with a raging fire that blazes like a trances,
They always warned me that he could be the Devil in Dance.
He leads me to sweet roses only to sting me like a bee,
There is a storm brewing in his eyes that flows right into me;
He finds me contented but always seems to leave me tense,
I wish I knew before I dove in,
    because I know he is the Devil in Dance.
He strums through my pain, and he plucks at the mind,
Never did I expect the demon that I would find,
When first I saw this serpent with his slivering prance,
But he can burn in the fires of hell,
    for he is just a Devil in Dance.

A Road Less Traveled

Ann Sluis

As a child, I felt I had no one.
I was alienated, tears fell often.
I needed to get away. I wanted to run away,
Probably from my fears of others,
But nonetheless,
I walked a road less traveled,
I looked at all the nature,
I smelt the flowers,
Felt the warm summer breeze
And somehow, someway,
I felt better.
As I grew older, I still felt alone.
I felt I needed someone to be there.
I wanted to experiment,
I wanted some excitement to run through my blood.
I wanted to experience fire and feel as free as the wind,
As wild as an untamed horse.
And so,
I ran a road less traveled,
The rush of the air threw my long locks
Back in a stream behind my head.
I felt the stones crunch under my feet.
I felt I was flying like an eagle,
Wild and high and no one could catch me
And somehow, someway,
I felt better.
And now, I am nearing adulthood.
I've learned a lot of lessons; I've learned whom I should trust
And that I should be more discerning
In my choice of friends and loves.
I've learned a lot. I've cried a lot.
    I've had many of pressures.
I've made a lot of mistakes.
    I've loved and lost and loved again.

I've been unable to work through these things at home-
It's too hard to think there-
Too much of the pressure stems from home anyhow-
I feel my best on the open road-
I feel the vibration of the car as the wheels turn beneath me.
I hear the hum of the engine,
The wind blows through the open window, and
Sends my hair flowing back
like a comet's tail behind my head.
Blaring music, brings a flood of memories.
They make me smile, make me laugh,
and sometimes make me cry.
And once more, I set out down the road...
I drive a road less traveled,
I follow it, through every detour-
Every pothole serves a lesson.
I try to avoid the craters in the road bed,
But sometimes, I hit a part of one.
And once in a while, I hit one head on-
Kind of like the mistakes in my life-
But my travels - they help me learn, help me grow-
Help me appreciate my life and everything around me
And somehow, someway
I feel better.

A Jester's Walk

Ann Sluis

He's a walking masterpiece,
An inspiration to the world of art;
He captivates me in all he does,
So, why does he infuriate me so?
He's a walking addiction,
He's a very potent endorphine;
He puts me into a natural high,
But why does he drain me so?
He's a walking roller coaster,
A thrill seeker's paradise;
He sends shockwaves of adrenaline through me,
So, why does he sicken me so?
He's a walking contradiction,
A devil at heart, you may say;
He sends mixed signals; a blizted out traffic light,
So, why do I love him so?

Lost

Ann Sluis

Beyond the realm of shadows,
In search of light of day;
As high and cold wind blows,
I heard a stranger say,
"Turn back, don't go beyond this point,
You will not like what you may find."
But senseless girl refuses to heed,
The warnings of her mind.
So, down I turned onto a path of jade,
That matched the lack of light;
Never thinking I'd find my fate,
Following me so close that night.
A crash uproarious rang through my ears,
Spun me around as fast as speed;
And all to my surprise I found,
That I would not succeed.
So teary-eyed I fled this place,
To find the familiar world I left behind;
And now all I have is the sun's warmth on my cheek,
For my eyes are now dead, I am blind.

Gardens and Grounds JJC, 1964

John Stobart

From a rustic swing
Looking south
I admire black-eyed Susans
And hollyhocks;
Gorging crimson, pink
And black-accented saffron,
I'm stirred by crescendoles of opulence
Provoking VanGough passions
Yet controlled
By gently curving brick paths
And patched of ground cover
And landscaped bushes and glasses.
Hilled and doled in graceful earth tones
Contrasted to gray glass and cement
Buildings emphasizing by their stolidity
And bluntness
Man's capacity for grace and beauty
Under challenge from stress and strain.

The Mind of a Child

Shirley J. Taylor

I had watched Helena sit passively for what seemed like hours. Taking mental notes on every curve and bend on her slight body, I tried to get to know everything I could take in about the physical being of this child. God knows I couldn't get inside her. The barrier that separated us was stronger than even the worst stubbornness I had ever encountered up until now. Briefly reflecting on Helena's secret life behind her protective shield, I had begun to hope that this thought, combined with my intent staring, might burn a hole through her will.

Early on, Helena's neurologist matter-of-factly informed me my child was not, nor would ever be like other children. The fact is, she is like other children—other autistic children. She is even doing much better than some we have encountered thus far. She can speak and walk and comprehend enough to be able to do both well. Beyond that I'm not entirely sure. For her doctor to negate my daughter's value in life by comparing her to other children is to negate her as a human being, handicapped or not.

From the first moment I held her tiny, listless body to my breast, we were inseparable. Everything I did, she responded with a coo or gurgle. The first time I held her, I sang "You Are So Beautiful" to her. She cooed. It was our song.

It was because of this song that I will never forget the day that Helena finally understood who I am. She was staring blankly at the television which was hawking a compilation CD of 1970's music. One of the songs featured was "You Are So Beautiful." Helena shook her head and blinked, almost looking like someone coming out of a trance. Expressionless, she turned her head around and looked where I was standing in the kitchen, preparing lunch. She neither smiled nor said one word, just turned back around toward the TV. Consciously, I wasn't quite sure what just happened, but subconsciously I realized my daughter had just associated me with the song I sang her. It seemed I had gotten through to her somehow and without really trying.

Now as Helena is turning into quite a little lady, I find myself wondering what we would be like were she "normal." Would boys have cooties? Would she confide in me her deepest wishes the way mothers and daughters are supposed to? How long would it be before I was telling her about the birds and the bees and she would be making gagging sounds, saying, "Gross Mom!" I suppose I should be thanking God that I don't have to worry about boys and curfews and first dates. But I'm not. Instead, I'm thanking Him that we live a relatively obscure life in a little white house with a white picket fence and that Helena is alive and the reason I happily exist.

Helena at play in our garden under the front window is quite a sight. She talks to the daffodils and the wildflowers as if at a tea party. If talking to flowers didn't look so odd, the scene would quietly fade into the backdrop of a lazy summer day. Other than the occasional passer-by gawking, there was no one. I wonder if she noticed.

Later in the afternoon while Helena was still preoccupied by God knows-what in the garden, I had decided to wash some dishes from breakfast. My hand was inside a glass when the glass broke. With no rubber gloves to protect my hand, a shard cut me open from the knuckle of my index finger and crescented around my thumb to the first knuckled of my thumb. It was a relatively deep cut, given the minute size of the piece of glass. Once I noticed the blood, even before the pain set in, I panicked and blurted obscenities. Helena noticed this. How could she not? I was sure she could sense something amiss. But she responded the only way Helena knew to respond: She looked up and looked away. The flowers were infinitely more interesting than a foul-mouthed mother. If my vision hadn't been blurred by tears, I might have seen the look on her face turn dour? No, I'm sure it was just tears.

The amount of blood I was losing and at the rate I was losing it caused me to become light-headed. Before blacking-out completely, I knew I needed to make my daughter aware - or try to - of my impending unconsciousness. As I spoke her name, trailing the last vowel, I crumpled to the floor in a mess of blood, glass and soap bubbles...

I opened my eyes only to see a man in a white shirt emblazoned with the logo of the town fire department. I noticed my hand had been bandaged and a cool cloth was lain upon my forehead. Helena's name escaped my lips in a short puff of breath. The paramedic smiled and proudly announced that "this wonderful child" saved my life. He relayed the unfolding story as it was relayed to him once he arrived at the scene. He said a 911 operator received a cryptic call from a little girl who sang over and over again, "You Are So Beautiful." The operator was then able to trace the call to our residence and the police and an ambulance were dispatched, not really sure what they would have waiting for them once they arrived.

Helena leaned over me and looked at me sympathetically. She must have known that only a miracle could make me feel any better because she performed one. She said, "I love you, Mom."

My daughter who was not like other children, thankfully, saved my life.

And for the first time in her life, I got a glimpse of what was inside her secret place.

Dedicated to my son, Michael.

Toby
Francine Tolf

If Toby were not a plump gray cat,
he would definitely have been a sea lion,
big-bottomed and boastfully demanding
attention from sea birds and all passersby
as he basked from the highest rock.

With a masterful crow
while I drink my morning coffee,
he announces to me his intention
of jumping into my lap,
a does so with a plop,
upsetting newspapers and saucer,
settling his ample haunches firmly
into the most comfortable position
a lap can possibly provide,
confident of his reception.

If Sheeba, long-legged and beautiful,
should walked by,
he might survey her from his height
with the indulgence of
a lolling, Eastern potentate,
or then again might take off
in sudden pursuit of her,
racing into the bedroom,
careening out from under the bed
and skidding to a halt
beside the refrigerator
which he is too fat to get behind:
and must suffer the taunting
of an elegant black paw
reaching out to bat at him.

I Will Return
Joe Ward

Seas of ships, hands in the air
People with cares. Lovers in love
Dreams of a new reality where we help everybody
Winters turn summer for change comes and goes
With each moment we grow
My thoughts at times seem distorted
    and my dreams are a bit too sad
Blues again with nothing or no one by my window
Except the beauty out in the sky. The stars to shine
Smoke gently floats out of my nose into the nights air
    for God to breathe
My moon looking to tell me a story
    of a unforgotten memory of a better place
Where just to live is an enjoyment
Where rivers run wild
The trees flow winds to the mountains air
Dreamland of a new life, hope not needed
Driven away, now here I stay but, know I will return one day

Nights Thoughts
Joe Ward

Silence in the night
The calm still air drifts ever so slowly by
Lightning flashes from the summer's heat
A dreamer walks alone, his quest unfulfilled
All he ever wanted was some truth to trust
In a world that can be so beautiful
Then can be so sad and depressed
Cars drive by
Then screams of madness and laughter
The rewinding stops, then I can hear Dylan
The music helps me to relax a little more
I puff on a pipe and let the smoke float gently into the air
For life to breathe
From nature back to natures breath
At times I'm so confused, but I tell myself not to worry
I know that everything is okay in my life now.
More is to come, so now I live and wait...

Wordeater 95 Student Jury:
Nicolle Byrnside
Jeff Hicks
Bob Loewe
Gale Tolf

Awards

Cover Design (His name is lost. Contact John Stobart about award.)

Prose ($5.00)
Janice Glavin
Milly Laux
Ralph W. Mlaska
Amy Nichols

Poetry ($5.00)
Rob Gondar
Milly Laux
Bob Loewe
Amy Nichols

John Stobart is solely responsible for the awards.

Submission Deadlines
Manuscript and cover designs
must be submitted to:
John Stobart, Room C-1069

by

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This issue contains selections from students, faculty, alumni and friends of Joliet Junior College.
Only current students are eligible for awards.

WORDEATER

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